

Aide-de-Camp's Library



Rashtrapati Bhavan
New Delhi

Accn. No. 12,444

Call No. VIII (A) - H

McChesney

from

B.E.C.

April 1944.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

SOME BLACK JACKET BOOKS

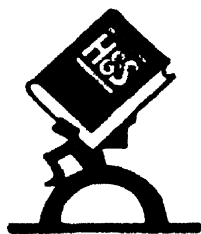
SERVICE OF OUR LIVES	EARL BALDWIN OF BEWDLEY
ON ENGLAND	EARL BALDWIN OF BEWDLEY
THIS TORCH OF FREEDOM	EARL BALDWIN OF BEWDLEY
OUR INHERITANCE	EARL BALDWIN OF BEWDLEY
THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON	J. M. BARRIE
MARY ROSE	J. M. BARRIE
QUALITY STREET	J. M. BARRIE
DEAR BRUTUS	J. M. BARRIE
A WINDOW IN THRUMS	J. M. BARRIE
MARGARET OGILVY	J. M. BARRIE
HOMILIES AND RECREATIONS	JOHN BUCHAN
THE KING'S GRACE	JOHN BUCHAN
MONTROSE	JOHN BUCHAN
MY MYSTERY SHIPS	VICE-ADMIRAL GORDON CAMPBELL
TEAK WALLAH	REGINALD CAMPBELL
THE LEISURE OF AN EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL	LORD EDWARD CECIL
THE ENGLISHMAN	W. MACNEILE DIXON
GREAT MOTHER FOREST	ATTILIO GATTI
IN QUEST OF THE SUN	ALAIN GERBAULT
THE CHARM OF BIRDS	LORD GREY OF FALLODON
THE HUNDRED YEARS	PHILIP GUEDALLA
THE HUNDRED DAYS	PHILIP GUEDALLA
THE VANISHED POMPS OF YESTERDAY	LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON
THE DAYS BEFORE YESTERDAY	LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON
HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE	LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON
GOOD-BYE, MR. CHIPS	JAMES HILTON
TO YOU, MR. CHIPS	JAMES HILTON
THE BOOK OF A NATURALIST	W. H. HUDSON
ENGLAND	DEAN INGE
TIBETAN TREK	RONALD KAULBACK
SIXTY POEMS	RUDYARD KIPLING
THE BOOK OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE	CAPTAIN C. W. R. KNIGHT
SAILING ALL SEAS IN THE 'IDLE HOUR'	DWIGHT LONG
THE HOME OF THE BLIZZARD	SIR DOUGLAS MAWSON
FEAR AND BE SLAIN	LORD MOTTISTONE
MYSTIC ISLES OF THE SOUTH SEAS	FREDERICK O'BRIEN
HENRIETTA MARIA	CAROLA OMAN
GONE RUSTIC	CECIL ROBERTS
EVEREST 1933	HUGH RUTLEDGE
ON THE EDGE OF THE PRIMEVAL FOREST	ALBERT SCHWEITZER
BORZOI	IGOR SCHWEZOFF
GINO WATKINS	J. M. SCOTT
THE VOYAGE OF THE CAP PILAR	ADRIAN SELIGMAN
ARCTIC JOURNEYS	EDWARD SHACKLETON
NANDA DEVI	ERIC SHIPTON
AN ALPINE JOURNEY	FRANK S. SMYTHE
CAMP SIX	FRANK S. SMYTHE
KAMET CONQUERED	FRANK S. SMYTHE
THE SPIRIT OF THE HILLS	FRANK S. SMYTHE
OVER TYROLESE HILLS	FRANK S. SMYTHE
AFTER EVEREST	T. HOWARD SOMERVELL
ENDLESS STORY	TAFFRAIL
SMOKE ON THE HORIZON	ADMIRAL C. V. USBORNE
THIS WAS ENGLAND	H. A. VACHELL
CRUISE OF THE CONRAD	ALAN VILLIERS
BY WAY OF CAPE HORN	ALAN VILLIERS
SHACKLETON'S BOAT JOURNEY	COMMANDER F. S. WORSLEY



NEAR WHERWELL

JOHN WALLER HILLS

A SUMMER ON
THE TEST



HODDER AND STOUGHTON
ST. PAUL'S HOUSE, LONDON, E.C.4

First Edition 1924
Third Edition (First in this form) . January 1941

Made and Printed in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton Limited,
by Butler & Tanner Ltd , Frome and London

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	9
I. THE TEST IN HISTORY	15
II. THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON	46
III. THE IRON BLUE	59
IV. MAY AND THE MAYFLY	66
V. A GOOD MAYFLY DAY	83
VI. A JUNE DAY	89
VII. HIGH SUMMER	104
VIII. JULY ON THE LOWER TEST	123
IX. AN AUGUST DAY	132
X. THE END OF THE SEASON.	137
XI. THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST.	148
XII. GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS	156
XIII. THE EVENING RISE	174
XIV. THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS.	191
XV. THE HARVEST MOON.	200
XVI. TWO DAYS	205
XVII. THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE	214
XVIII. STOCKBRIDGE	218
XIX. THE NYMPH	231
XX. AFTER MANY YEARS.	238

ILLUSTRATIONS

By ROBERT GIBBINGS

	PAGE
NEAR WHERWELL	<i>Frontispiece</i>
NEAR WHITCHURCH	38
MOTTISFONT	48
MOTTISFONT	76
LONGPARISH	91
STOCKBRIDGE	219
A BRIDGE OVER THE TEST	256

P R E F A C E

T O T H E F I R S T E D I T I O N

ANYONE WHO FOLLOWS, AS THE AUTHOR OF THIS book has tried to follow, the history of a noble river must be dull if he is not struck by the great human interest which is attached to our sport. Fishing has always been a progressive pursuit; it has always had a special attraction for the leisure of the intellectual, and each age has added to its development. Some periods have added more, some less; but progress has never stopped and is going on continuously. Tackle is constantly being refined still further, increased knowledge is gained of the habits of fish and of insects, and above all, the old difficulties and the old problems are being reconsidered and restated from the point of view to-day. That is my excuse for adding one more book to a vast literature. It must never be forgotten that each age looks at questions from its own angle, and requires them to be formulated in its own terms. And each restatement, if made with insight and truth, carries the problem one stage further.

It is from this point of view, from the fact that every epoch requires to say its own say, that the writing of a new book on fishing is not only justified, but may be valuable. I have had to read a good

P R E F A C E

many: but, leaving out those writers who know nothing themselves and steal from others, I can honestly say that there is a place for all. Some have had less experience than others, and show less skill in presenting it: but everyone contributes something who tells what he has seen and done. At the best, he makes an advance in the art: at the least, he records contemporary practice. May I therefore be allowed to say that the literature of fishing is a fine literature: that I know of no pursuit which possesses a finer: and that I hope that all who can do so will add to it? Especially those who have fished for a generation or longer ought to publish their recollections. Though we, who belong to that class, do not realize it, the fishing of our youth was the fishing of a past age, and we are able to describe a state of things which no longer exists.

This is beside the way; so let us open the gate once more and walk the well-known path through the shining water meadows and over the plank bridge, across the dark, still carrier and over the sunlit runner, back to the banks of our famous river. We are lucky to be allowed to walk her banks, for they are pleasant: and perhaps it is more pleasant still to do so in company of old fishers who are gone. Certainly I for one have always been attracted by the old writers, since I first knew them, and the more I have fished the better I seemed to understand them. I should be sorry to lose their companionship. It is fifty years and more since I caught my first trout, thirty-four years since I first fished the Test and killed a trout on the dry fly, and in that very same year I began collecting fish-

P R E F A C E

ing books. From that time the two pursuits have gone hand-in-hand.

Fishing old and famous rivers, rivers which great men in the past have studied and frequented, has always had a peculiar charm for me. I care not for your reservoirs, your newly stocked waters, your made trout streams, however mighty their inhabitants. No. There are two classes of water which make the highest appeal to the imagination and the emotion. There are those which are unknown and unfished, whose mysterious depths may contain anything, and which you are the first to explore. Everyone who has fished such knows with what expectation and awe you draw near. But an emotion equally strong, though different, is given by fishing a river which has been fished for centuries. As I walk its banks, I like to think of those who have walked before me, who have seen the same sights as I see, been faced by the same problems, met with the same disasters and rejoiced in the same triumphs. I like to think that they have been there, those men of the long rod and horsehair line, slow and watchful, crafty men of their hand, quietly studying some great trout as I am studying him, and plotting his defeat as I am plotting it. And after much fishing and much musing over its problems, which are at once always the same and always different, I have turned again to the old writers, and read them with a new light and a new knowledge. Much that was obscure has been made plain and much that seemed archaic or obsolete or even childish has taken on a new meaning. This meaning I have tried to express, and have tried to

P R E F A C E

illustrate it by experience drawn from the noblest of trout streams. It is for readers of this book to say whether the attempt is successful.

But, besides the past, it is well to look to the future. We, too, shall grow out of date. Fishers of a hundred years hence will caste an easy smile on ourselves and on our methods which we think so delicate and so final. Our tackle and our dress, our practice and our appearance, will seem to belong to the dark ages. In the *Chronicles* of the Houghton Fishing Club is an old photograph of members of the club taken outside the Grosvenor Arms at Stockbridge less than a century ago. Look at their immense top hats, white and black, their clumsy square-tailed coats, their whiskers, their fourteen-foot rods, their heavy sea boots. And yet they were great fishers, those old members of the club, and great men too, picked men, the best of their time. Is it possible that we shall ever be like that? Not only shall we be, but we are: we are, to the eye of futurity a century hence. We are just as antique, as obsolete and as far away. A hundred years from now you and your Leonard rod and your fashionable coat and smart wading boots will look as that old photograph looks. Everything will be changed: the rods, the nets, the clothes, the faces, the very figures. Only the Test will be the same, and its trout, and the sport of fishing, and possibly the Grosvenor Arms. The river will remain, so long as a growing town population does not abstract all its pure springs. The trout will be there, until tar poisoning kills the last. And where clear waters and trout are found, there

P R E F A C E

will fishing be found also. And it is difficult to believe that the Grosvenor Arms will ever change.

It is in this spirit that I present the book to the public. The Test of to-day, the existing river with its crystal streams and its portly trout, with its lovely valley, its bridges, its trees, its chalk cliffs and its broad water meadows, I have tried to depict. But since fishing is an affair not of to-day alone, but of the past also, an attempt has been made to show how what now exists has arisen out of what is gone. And since time is moving always, and the sport of fishing, because it is a progressive one, moves quicker than time itself, I hope I am not presumptuous in thinking that future years may like to know what fishing meant to us who live in the present day, and what the Test actually looked like, set down here not only in the imperfect demonstration of words, but visibly depicted in black and white. At any rate, if fishermen, particularly those of Hampshire, are willing to accept this book as a not inadequate representation of the Test and its trout to-day, I shall be well content.

J. W. H.

MOTTISFONT, *13th September, 1924.*



P R E F A C E
T O T H E S E C O N D E D I T I O N

A SECOND EDITION IN A LESS AMBITIOUS FORM having been called for, I have taken the opportunity to revise the book throughout and have written seven additional chapters.

J. W. H.

LONDON, 10th *July*, 1930.

CHAPTER I
THE TEST IN HISTORY

Most pure and piercing the aire of this Shire
and none in England hath more plenty of clear
and fresh rivulets of troutful water.

The Worthies of England. (Hampshire)

By THOMAS FULLER 1662

IT IS CURIOUS THAT A RIVER SUCH AS THE TEST, famous throughout history for its salmon and trout, should have such scanty records of rod fishing before modern days. From the earliest times its stock of fish has been abundant and obvious: its fisheries, not only for salmon, but also the up-river ones, were valuable and are frequently mentioned: Walton and many later writers talk of Hampshire as the pre-eminent home of the trout: and yet of angling there is no account which goes beyond the beginning of last century. None of the great writers of the past has described it. Walton wrote of a day's fly fishing on the Lea when Cromwell was at the summit of his power: Cotton described more than one day on the Dove in the reign of Charles II; and even the Cumberland Eden has its historian in the gloomy and periphrastic Franck, who fished and moralized there in the year that the Lord Protector died. But no one leads us to the banks

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

of the Test until we go there in the company of Peter Hawker of Longparish in the reign of George III. True, when its angling records do start, they are complete and continuous. But they are late. Trout flies had been dressed for three hundred and fifty years before we can say for certain that they were cast on its clear streams.

No doubt they were. If fly fishing was practised anywhere, it must surely have been practised in Hampshire, where natural flies are plentiful, trout conspicuous, and where transparent water enables both to be observed so easily. It is difficult to believe that men did not use artificials there as soon as they knew how to dress them: and this they probably knew by the year 1450. Therefore by that year, at a time when an overburdened saint, Henry VI of England, had not only succeeded in losing nearly all our French possessions, which may have been for our good, but had also rendered inevitable the Wars of the Roses, which certainly were not: at a time, too, when men, seeing no relief from the distractions and miseries of the age, suddenly heard a rumour that there had arisen in Kent one Jack Cade, one Jack Amend-all, who would ease them of their intolerable suffering, put the world to right, and do something for the poor: at about that time, assuredly an unsuitable one for a peaceful pursuit, I have no doubt that the first Test trout had already fallen to a fly.

This, however, is conjecture. We may assume, we do not know. But we do know that net and weir fisheries on the Test were established centuries before the Wars of the Roses, for they are earlier

THE TEST IN HISTORY

than the Norman Conquest. And not only the salmon fisheries of the lower waters. Domesday has many references to these, as may be imagined; but it also mentions fisheries to which no salmon can have ascended. Thus the Abbess of Wherwell owned a fishery at Longparish, then called Middle-tune, "for the use of the hall": and there was another Test fishery pertaining to another Middle-tune, Middleton Abbey in Dorset, for we read that:

"The Abbey of Middletune has 12 acres of land, and Edward the sheriff holds them of the Abbey. It was never assessed. There is 1 villain with 2 oxen and 1 acre of meadow. There was a fishery, but not now."

We can almost hear the wail of distress running through that frigid entry. There was once a fishery, but there is none to-day. The Test is ruined, absolutely ruined, it seems to cry; the fishing is nothing to what it was. Ah, in the good old days of Edward the Confessor the Test used to hold trout, but now that these Normans have come—well, perhaps, all ages say the same, and with as little justification. We of to-day are not exempt, and possibly we are as wrong.

Salmon fisheries are outside the scope of this book. Those of the Test were important, but a little overshadowed by the more valuable and productive ones of the neighbouring Avon. Still, one or two references are too delightful and too intimate to be passed by. In 1396 the Abbess of the great Convent of Romsey granted William Berill permission to build a fulling mill on the river,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

but it was expressly provided that he was not to fish without a licence. Wise and excellent lady, an example to us. Doubtless what she wanted was to prevent the use of net or weir, and she looked to such material matters as the revenues of her house and the supply of food for her nuns. Small blame to her if she did. I like her all the better for it, But I like also to think that though she might have been stiff about a net, she would have looked with a tolerant eye on rod and line. I can see her giving a licence for a day's rod fishing. May her soul have peace. When you next visit that austere and lovely Abbey you will not do wrong in saying a prayer for her salvation. A few years later, again, her successor showed that she could assert her rights. In 1435 John Sexsteyn and Thomas Talar stopped the watercourse next Stretmede with a dam, and took the Lady Abbess' fish, "to her grave hurt, with pottes and other instruments." They were fined the inadequate sum of sixpence each.¹

Fish poaching, however, was not the only evil which troubled the peace of the Lady Abbesses of Romsey. The nuns under their charge seem to have wanted a lot of looking after. In 1302 Bishop John de Pontoise made a visitation of the Abbey, and "having found certain things to be corrected," he drew up a list of ordinances. Among them occur the following:²

"Item, that the Convent should rise earlier than they were used to do, and sing Matins and

¹ Manor Court Rolls, Romsey, 201/18 P.R.O.

² Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 26774-26780.

THE TEST IN HISTORY

other Hours at the proper hours of the day, so that High Mass should always be celebrated before the ninth hour. Item, that the doors of the cloister and dormitory be more strictly and better kept and closed. Item, it is forbidden to eat, drink, or spend the night in the town of Romsey with any religious or secular person, and the Abbess shall not grant licence to any religious lady to the contrary."

But John de Pontoise, like the wise Bishop that he was, did not confine himself to correcting the ladies, for we read:

"Item, a useless, superfluous, quarrelsome and incontinent servant, and one using insolent language to the ladies, shall be removed within a month from the reception of these presents, and especially John Chark, who has often spoken ill and contumaciously in speaking to and answering the ladies, unless he correct himself, so that no more complaints be made to the Bishop. Item, that the good customs and courtesies hitherto observed among the ladies, as of the pantry, the buttery and the bakery, be in no way lessened in the future, but from day to day be kept."

The nuns, however, seem to have slipped back into their old way of stopping in bed late: for when Bishop Henry Woodlock visited the Abbey in 1311 he also found it necessary to enjoin that "the Convent shall rise earlier than is accustomed for the office of Matins," repeating the ordinance of Bishop

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

John de Pontoise. He also found "the tranquillity of the nuns to be much disturbed and scandals to arise in your Convent"; wherefore he ordered that secular women, both married and single, who were staying there, "shall be wholly removed from the Abbey without hope of return."

Apparently the nuns were still having a good time, for the Bishop went on to order that not only shall the doors of the dormitory be kept closed at the proper hours, but he repeated the ordinance that "no lady shall eat, drink, or spend the night in the town of Romsey outside the precincts of the Convent."

In 1492, nearly two hundred years later, Archbishop Morton ordered that a visitation of the Abbey be carried out. This was accordingly done by Master Robert Shirbourne, Treasurer of Hereford Cathedral. He found that things were even more lax, and the Abbess, Dame Elizabeth Broke, had no hesitation in "speaking" about the nuns under her charge.

"Item, she deposes that nuns are suspected of going into the town by the church door. Item, she prays that they may not frequent taverns and other suspected places. Item, she prays that they may not go outside the Convent without her leave."

A number of the nuns were also examined by Master Robert, and their depositions reveal anything but a happy state of affairs. One of them, Dame Joan Paten, after getting her own back by making a general complaint of the Abbess, deposed

THE TEST IN HISTORY

that none of the nuns had been punished for seven years. She also deposed that people "stand chatting in the middle of the choir," and begs that no one may be allowed to go out of the choir without leave. All the nuns who came after her agreed with her, so it seems likely that her charges were justified. Dame Agnes Hervey, however, contented herself with complaining that the beer was extremely poor. Joan Paten, by the way, is described as a chantress, and apparently she was popular with the nuns. At a later visitation, in 1501, she went one better, and made unpleasant insinuations on the morals of the Abbess.

But Romsey Abbey had been founded for centuries, and many Lady Abbesses had reigned and died, before the early fisherman, with his long hazel rod and his twisted horsehair line, was a common sight on the banks of the Test. The seasons came and the seasons went. In April innumerable grannom danced over the transparent water, and in May the mayfly filled the air as snowflakes fill it in winter. Reed warblers and sedge warblers sang every spring, redshanks piped, and many other birds made merry which now are destroyed or banished. And all the time the river flowed through its beautiful valley, more beautiful then than now, fleeting over golden shallows and swinging round deep curves, watering many meadows and turning many mills. Indeed, strange and sacrilegious as it may sound to us, the waters of the Test had more value for driving mill wheels than as a home for trout. Four mills at Overton, together with a fishery, were let in 1446 for the then

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

immense rent of £9 6s. 8d.; and it would not be rash to guess that the 6s. 8d. was the value of the fishery and the £9 of the mills, for about a century later, in Henry VIII's reign, the Bishop of Winchester let apparently the same fishery at Overton for the same annual rent of 6s. 8d. and a dish of fishes of the value of 8d. for the Bishop's officer. Those were happy days for the impecunious angler, and not unhappy ones for the Bishop's officer.

But not only were the waters of the Test regarded for their material value: her trout also were scurvily treated. Hampshire, to-day the home of the most finished school of fishing in the world, was in earlier times distinguished for practices of the opposite sort. Walton saw there, and saw nowhere else, the custom of spearing trout by torch-light: a custom I am pleased to say he detested. Giles Jacob,¹ writing in 1718, singles it out as the only county where cross-lining for trout was practised. He gives a long and good account of this, the first that I know. And it survived a considerable time. Durnford² used it at Chilbolton as late as 1819, but only, I think, when there was not enough wind to lift the blow line. Possibly it survived still longer. It is not mentioned by Peter Hawker nor in the *Chronicles* of the Houghton Club, of which more later. True, it is not forbidden by the club rules, but on the other hand I can find no account of its practice. It was probably not used, not from moral reprobation, for blow line and worm and minnow were allowed and employed

¹ *The Compleat Sportsman*, 1718.

² *The Diary of a Test Fisherman*, published in 1911.

THE TEST IN HISTORY

freely, but because its employment in club waters is open to obvious objection. It must have been a most deadly way of taking a shy fish, for the fly could be dropped four inches in front of him, passed over him without drag wherever he was rising, and with no gut on the water.

It may be argued that there is nothing strange in the practice of spearing and cross-lining: that in the time of the Commonwealth, when Walton wrote, fishing was so rude that whether you fished fair or cross-lined made very little difference. But this is not so. Fishing was refined and skilful. Walton himself contributed nothing to the science of the fly, but his three contemporaries, Thomas Barker, Robert Venables and Charles Cotton, contributed much. Fly rods, already differentiated from bait rods, were made of light hazel, with butts of ash or fir and tips of whalebone. Lines also were made specially for fly fishing, heavy like ours, and tapered evenly from as many as twelve or even twenty strands down to a casting line which might be of single horsehair. On that, and without a reel, Barker could kill the greatest trout that swims, if he had sea room; and he says that a single hair will kill five trout to one taken on coarser tackle. Think of it. How would you like to kill a four-pounder on single horsehair with no reel?¹ Yet they did it, and did it regularly, those great fishers who are dead. And this incidentally proves two things: the first that fish were shyer than we

¹ The reel was of course known, and Barker and Walton describe it. But it was not used for trout fishing for a century or more.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

imagine, and the second that men were better anglers. Their tackle was more delicate than we think. Not only had they good rods and lines, but small flies also were used, admirable imitations. Chetham, writing a few years later in the reign of Charles II, gives a list which could be used to-day. His march brown is as good as any you buy now. His dressing of the blue dun is almost identical with that of Halford two centuries later. No, there was no lack of delicate tackle, and of skill in its use, when the Lord Protector ruled England.

But here again it must be repeated that though the tackle and skill existed there is no proof that they were used on the Test. Walton visited Hampshire, and it is safe to say that where he went he fished. But he has left no account of it such as he left of the Lea, or Cotton of the Dove. Later writers do the same: they praise, as Walton praised, the swift, shallow, clear and lovely rivers of Hampshire and her admirable trout. But no one describes a day's fishing at Mottisfont or Houghton or Bransbury Common or Whitchurch: no one tells us how the mayfly hatched at Stockbridge or the grannom at Leckford.

We have therefore to be content with bare mentions, which tell us nothing, until we reach the beginning of last century. From there onwards we have a continuous history, always good, and increasing in volume as it goes on. Just one word first as to the authorities. The diary of the great Colonel Peter Hawker of Longparish starts in 1802 and runs to 1853. The diary of the Reverend Richard Durnford of Chilbolton goes from 1809 to

THE TEST IN HISTORY

1819, and excellent it is. Then in 1822 begin the *Chronicles* of the Houghton Fishing Club, and they are continuous till to-day. In 1908 they were edited by Sir Herbert Maxwell. Penn wrote of the Test in 1833 and Edward Jesse in 1836. Then we have Kingsley in 1857, Halford who fished it from 1877, and other writers, living and dead, who bring the account up to date. Thus we have a continuous history from 1802 to the present day, or one hundred and twenty-eight years. Those years too are years of progress. They saw the introduction of the short rod, of the floating fly, of drawn gut and of the nymph. And since they are years of progress, they are also years of transition. Test fishing one hundred years ago was very different from what it is now.

Trout fishing on the Test in Hawker's time and long after was divided into certain well-marked periods of which the dry fly formed no part. In the early months, and Hawker caught good conditioned trout even in January, the fishing was with two flies downstream. Then came the grannom, in April and May, immense hatches of it, when again fish took the artificial. This on many waters was the first festival; and the second was like unto it but greater, the hatch of the mayfly. When this was on, some advanced individuals fished the artificial, but nine out of ten used the natural fly on a blow line. When the mayfly disappeared, the artificial caperer was used. Again at the end of the season, and Hawker fished till December, the artificial killed once more, and all through the year it was useful on rough windy days. Lastly, worm

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and minnow were not unknown, and the minnow certainly was regarded with no disfavour.

Their fishing season was indeed different from ours. On calm days, in May, June and July, when olives were sailing down in the fleets in which they appeared in that happy epoch: when great trout rose steadily and rose all day, when they took every fly and ceased not until gorged: days such as we long for and dream about: the fisher of that age either stayed at home or used worm or minnow. It was an accepted law that when fish were taking duns on the top of the water the artificial was useless, except on rough or windy days.

And indeed on some waters fly fishing was only practised during the mayfly season. Major Turle says in the *Victoria County History* that they hardly ever fished till the mayfly was up, and very little after it had disappeared, and Sir Humphry Davy says the same. Truly it was a different world.

But though their age seems a long way off, there are many questions of absorbing interest to us. Did they fish upstream or down? With one fly or two? Were their flies copies of natural insects? Who first used a short rod and who first cast against the wind?

Upstream fly fishing is no modern upstart. It is older by far than Stewart, its reputed father, who wrote in 1857—older by two centuries. It was well known in that remarkable epoch, at the end of the Protectorate and beginning of the Restoration, of which I have just written. Colonel Robert Venables, one of the three great ones of that time, a brave and distinguished soldier of Cromwell's

THE TEST IN HISTORY

army, who in conjunction with Admiral Penn took from Spain Jamaica, one of our earliest colonies, found time to fish as well as to fight, and incidentally he argues the case between upstream and down as it would be argued to-day. He makes it perfectly clear that to fish upstream was a common practice in his day, not confined to a few experts. And this view is reinforced by another piece of evidence, which makes it more than likely that the practice prevailed in Hampshire, for the witness who gives it was Hampshire born and may have gained his experience there. John Worlidge wrote *Systema Agriculturae* in 1669, one of those delicious books on farming, gardening and country life which are a glory of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which almost reconcile one to the English climate. Such books often contain a section on fishing, sometimes second-hand and trivial, sometimes original and valuable. What Worlidge writes is obviously the result of his own observations as a fly fisher.¹ He advises you to wade a shallow, fast stream if the bottom be hard; and says that, if you "cast your Fly up against the Stream, the Trout that lies upon the Fin in such strong Currents, and discerns you not, being behind him, presently takes your bait."

That is an excellent description of upstream fishing. How admirable too is the phrase "the trout that lies upon the fin." We all know that trout. We all know the difference between a trout who lies on the bottom, surly and dejected, with motionless fins: and that other, eager, vital,

¹ See the 3rd edition, 1681, at page 257.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and with fins a-quiver, poised near the surface, who "lies upon the fin," who, if we bungle not, takes our iron blue.

Therefore at the time when a weary England welcomed the return of Charles II, when there were men living who must have seen and talked to Shakespeare, when George Wither, who was Hampshire born, and Andrew Marvell were still singing, and Milton had not yet written *Paradise Lost*, men fished the artificial fly upstream; and they have done so ever since. So much is certain. And it is probable that they did so in Hampshire, and more than possible that they did so on the Test. Whether it was common there it is difficult to say, and judging by the practice two centuries later I do not think it was: for though Worlidge may have done so in the seventeenth century neither Hawker nor Durnford did so in the nineteenth. But it was undoubtedly practised at Houghton in their time, for it is described by Richard Penn in the club diary in 1829.¹ Thirty years later Kingsley does certainly warn his pupil to avoid that "mistake natural enough to the laziness of fallen man," downstream fishing, and he is writing of the Test: but his very insistence on the necessity of the upstream method shows that it was something unusual.

Both Hawker and Durnford, therefore, fished downstream, or across and down. Both used two flies, Durnford only on windy days, Hawker always. Hawker always used the same, except presumably during the mayfly: a yellow dun for

¹ Penn subsequently embodied his notes in a book: *Maxims and Hints for Anglers*, 1833.

THE TEST IN HISTORY

tail fly and a small red palmer for dropper. His yellow dun would probably have a body of yellow marten or fox fur, a light hackle and starling wings: that was the common dressing of the time. Durnford used a wider selection: hare's fleck, apple green, sky blue, iron blue, grannom, mayfly, cowdung, a spinner, a dun, caperer, and a fly called "the kingdom," much approved. He stuck many of his artificials in his diary, but unluckily only three are reproduced in the book. They appear to be well dressed, with starling wings. The smallest is No. 1 of our scale. He used the blow line with natural flies freely, not only the mayfly, but blue-bottles, daddy longlegs and sedges. And the worm and minnow had their place too.

Durnford was clearly a good fisherman, good observer and good companion. He used a single fly, except on windy days, when he used a dropper. He did not like it, but he says that the dropper steadies the tail fly, and in a strong wind makes it more visible. This of course is true. He kept his line taut, and the dropper on the top of the water. Then he always knew where his tail fly was, and did not miss his rises, as he easily might, particularly in a gale. I imagine that he cast across stream, and then kept his line tight either by drawing his fly or letting the current carry it round. I am pretty sure he did not cast upstream.

Nor did Hawker, though he knew how to throw across, or against the wind. Most fishermen, he says, choose the windward bank, and fish get shy; choose the leeward, and "throw against (or rather under) the wind." He too was clearly a good

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

fisher. And he was a great character—conceited, obstinate, opinionated and passionate; but eager, vital, enthusiastic and tireless. His book on shooting is the best of any, and always will be. He was a fine shot, and even in those early days once got fifty-one brace of partridges in a day to his own gun: and yet he would spend all of another day chasing one cock pheasant. He delights in talking of his skill. And it was not conceit which makes him do so, but a simple faith that everything belonging to him must be perfect. Gun or dog or fly rod, his was the best. So with trout fishing. He loved his home, and no wonder: but just because it was his it was the best, and other Test waters worthless; and I have the feeling that they are debased in order to exalt his adored Longparish. He goes to Stockbridge. “Found the fly fishing, as it almost always is at this celebrated though infamously bad place, not worth a penny.” And he inveighs against what he saw there, “the cockney-like amusement of bobbing with a live mayfly is all that this miserable river does for.” He himself hated the blow line, God rest his soul, and rarely used it. Contrasted with this his sport at Longparish is described as excellent or glorious or by similar epithets. He admits that Stockbridge trout are “immensely large” but they are “so flabby and soft as to be scarcely worth eating.” This is in June with trout in their prime. Compare this with his admirable Longparish, where even on the 2nd October they cut “red as a salmon and full of curd as a new-laid egg.” And on the 14th January 1818 he killed in an hour as many trout as he could carry:

THE TEST IN HISTORY

and they too cut red and were full of curd. And even on 29th December 1842—good gracious me—when he gets six brace, they prove when broiled as good as in the early part of the season. Truly no one ever had such a river or such trout! Nor were there many such fishermen. When he was crippled with the wound he got at Talavera, he could not keep away, but drove down and caught fish with a fly as he sat in a phaeton. And later he was “ludicrously amused with throwing a fly on horse-back”: but we read with relief that he then caught no takeable fish.

Both Hawker and Durnford got bags which were often big, sometimes immense. On 17th June 1809 Durnford, with his friend Penrose, his usual companion, got eighty-eight fish weighing 84 lb., all on the natural mayfly. With the artificial his best day was 4th May of the same year, when, fishing alone, he killed thirty fish, 22½ lb.: “Chevalier’s dun-coloured body with starling wings. All the fish caught with this very same fly, which still remains perfect and entire.” Hawker gives no weights, except occasionally of individual fish. He frequently got twenty brace and over. Longparish has always provided heavy catches, and about the middle of last century forty brace were killed in the mill pool there by one rod in one afternoon. Stockbridge, too, still keeps up its reputation for big fish, and it is possible that Mr. A. N. Gilbey’s performance in 1906, when in six days, not consecutive, he caught sixty-six trout weighing 136 lb. 4 oz., has never been equalled.

Both Hawker and Durnford kept everything of

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

three quarters of a pound and upwards. So, by the way, did that mighty fisher, George Selwyn Marryat, fishing at Houghton as late as 1881: but be it said that they were grayling. Personally I do not think it would be a bad thing to kill the three-quarter pound trout and return the fish between one and two pound which have the makings of three-pounders. We all know the look of those fish. But perhaps that demands too much trust in the future.

Durnford's best was 3 lb., Hawker's rather less, and both got larger ones with the net. Houghton fish were much bigger, ranging from one of 11 lb. 12 oz., killed in 1898 on raw meat, down to the biggest killed on the floating fly, one of 6 lb. 9 oz., caught on a sedge in 1904. The best grayling taken on the fly at Houghton was 3 lb. 10 oz. Halford in his *Autobiography* records one of exactly the same weight killed there on a worm by the late Francis Walbran, the well-known tackle maker of Leeds.

But Durnford, though he had the free run of a vast extent of water, did not kill much more in the season than we do. He had better days but fewer. Hawker, however, did. In May 1821 four hundred and twenty-four fish were taken at Longparish in the one month: and a little later, "finding that it now becomes a kind of trumpery theme for reputation to kill so many fish" he sets to and catches forty-six takeable trout in five hours. Such bags seem very far off to us. But sometimes we feel strangely at home. On 11th June 1817 he fished at Stockbridge. "After two days' fishing I caught but four brace of trout; and so execrable is the

THE TEST IN HISTORY

Stockbridge fishing that this was literally called good sport." There is not much change in a hundred years.

But though Durnford and Hawker were downstream men, Penn, and no doubt other members of the Houghton Club, were upstream. Flies were generally large. Kingsley speaks of "our large chalk flies," and advises his pupil to use a large governor or caperer, regardless of clearness or season. Thus does history repeat itself, for south country flies have always been bigger than north, since Cotton, nearly two hundred years before Kingsley, hung a fat-bodied London fly in his parlour window to laugh at. And Kingsley tells of the minute north country flies just introduced in the year 1858 on the Itchen, where fishermen fished nothing else after the mayfly, and they fished upstream, and fished successfully. Thus there were the two schools, which always have divided fly fishing, those who fished a long line and large flies downstream, and those who fished a shorter line and smaller flies up. And at the back of the fishers' mind was the comfortable assurance that blow line and spinning tackle existed to retrieve a blank day.

Flies were copied from nature, as they have been since the beginning of things. Rods, I suspect, were long: for though Stewart in 1857 used one of from eight to nine feet, Francis Francis recommends a two-hander, and his shortest single-handed was eleven feet seven inches. As late as 1901, two-handed rods were used at Hungerford for the mayfly, and possibly they are still.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

It has been the fashion of the early dry fly fishers to speak disparagingly of their immediate predecessors. They are represented as clumsy floggers of the water, monotonously and unintelligently pitching two flies downstream on heavy gut, waiting for a trout more silly than usual to lay hold. They have been described not only as incredibly incompetent, but as lacking in all fishing sense and all river knowledge. This may have been true of some, for there are bad fishermen in all ages: but I refuse to believe that it was true of all or of most. Fishing the sunk fly is as exacting and entrancing an art as fishing the dry: in fact I am not sure that fishing it upstream when you cannot see your fish is not the highest art of all. And let it be remembered, too, that even that object of ridicule, the downstream man, if he casts frequently and lifts his flies before they drag, can, if he knows his work and has a light hand, drift them very successfully over a rising fish. Stewart knew this, and said so, upstream man though he was. At any rate, if the Test did not produce a race of patient, knowledgeable, highly skilled fishers, cunning and slow moving, knowing all there was to know about flies and fish, not unacquainted with small hooks and fine tackle, not ignorant of the importance of exact copy and the danger of drag—if it did not produce such a race long before the first dry fly floated, then it is the only river I know which did not.

Out of these conditions, and against this background, appeared the floating fly. It appeared because sunk fly fishing was too difficult. It was invented to make the catching of trout easier. It

THE TEST IN HISTORY

was advocated because with it you could get a better bag than under the older system. Modern writers have got into the curious trick of thinking the opposite. They talk as though it made the catching of trout harder, and was meant to do so. They write as though it were introduced in order to protect the trout from any except the skilled. From this comes the strange inversion that the sunk fly is easier than the dry. It ought to be forbidden, they say, because any fool can kill with it. It is on a level with worm or maggot. What a misreading of history and what a travesty of fact! It is the result of a confusion of thought. It may be that putting a dry fly over a trout is harder than putting a wet. It may be that the individual stroke requires more skill, though I am not at all sure that it does. Similarly it may be that the actual shot at a driven grouse is harder than at one walked up. But even the most average of average shots will kill more of a given number of shy birds driving than walking, simply because when walking he does not get a chance at one in twenty. So it is when trout are taking duns. The veriest beginner at the dry fly gets more than he would with the wet. The parallel is exact. It need hardly be said that the curious legend that the dry fly was invented in order to make fishing more difficult was unknown to the patriarchs who started it. Pulman tells fishermen to use it because with it they will catch more fish. Stoddart noticed that the first cast of the day, when the fly was dry and floated, often produced a good trout, whereas subsequent casts with the fly wet produced none. Francis Francis used it on

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

the Itchen because it killed better than the other plan. It was the generation after these great ones, a generation that knew not the sunk fly, who started the fable, and it has been repeated with gathering momentum until to-day. It is untrue. The nymph is more difficult than the floater.

The date of the floating fly's invention is uncertain, and this is not the place for a long discussion. It is sufficient to say that the mark of the completed art, the intentional drying of the fly, is first mentioned in 1851, but is implied, though not described, ten years earlier.¹ The floating fly may have been used in the thirties of last century: we should be safe in dating it in the early forties: 1845 would be within the mark. From 1851 there is a continuous history. Francis Francis described it in the *Field* in 1857, and in 1867, in his *Book of Angling*, which went through numerous editions, he spread the creed far and wide. But it was not till Halford wrote *Floating Flies* in 1884 that it received its real impetus and reached more than a few rivers.

It is, therefore, over eighty years since man, whose inventive mind is always on the watch for means of getting even with his crafty adversary, floated over his innocent and unsuspecting nose an artificial which imitated an olive or iron blue or mayfly newly hatched. He got a temporary advantage, which his opponent has long ago caught up. During these eighty years three generations of anglers have arisen, have fished and are gone, and we are in the last quarter of the first century. Some

¹ Pulman *Vade Mecum of Fly Fishing for Trout*, 1st and 3rd editions, 1841 and 1851.

THE TEST IN HISTORY

of us indeed belong to an earlier age. But in these eighty years trout have learnt much that they did not know before. The battle is not unequal.

Such is the short history of this great invention. When did it reach the Test? Ah, that is difficult to answer. It probably originated on the Itchen, and oddly enough took some years to cross the few miles to the Test. In 1857 Francis Francis had used it for long on the Itchen, and yet in 1858 Kingsley knew nothing of it on the Test, and he was an equally good fisherman, an acute observer, and interested in the deeper problems of the art. Halford came to the river in 1877. A colleague of his says that in 1875 only half or less of their club fished it, and that it was not till 1882 that the large sunk fly, fished downstream, disappeared. It is difficult to believe that this was typical of the river as a whole. It cannot have been. It is impossible to prove it was not, for I can find no written evidence, and my experience does not go beyond 1890. In that year I found myself, fishing the dry fly for the first time, faced by a terrific evening rise at Whitchurch, and a nice mess I made of it. But I did manage to get one simple-minded trout to disregard my flailings and take a red quill. At Whitchurch in 1890 no one dreamed of using anything but the dry fly, except occasionally when fishing still water on a windy day. But the curious point is that the Houghton *Chronicles* do not mention its introduction. When I think of the change which its use has made: how it has altered not only the fisherman's practice, but his temperament and outlook: when I run my eye over the vast literature

A SUMMER ON THE TEST



NEAR WHITCHURCH

to which it has given rise: I marvel that in what is its second home no one has recorded its adoption. Perhaps it is an example of the truths that we often overlook that which is nearest and describe worst what we know best.

Indeed, from the analogy of other rivers, I find it incredible that the dry fly had not captured the Test before 1882. It was common on the Itchen since the 'fifties. In the 'sixties James Ogden introduced it on the Derbyshire Wye, so successfully that the owner of the water prohibited the blow line. Halford found it in full swing on the Wandle in 1868. Francis Francis in 1867 says that it was greatly used on southern streams. The Test must have been one of these.

Wherever it was introduced, it conquered. The sunk fly was swept away, beaten and ridiculed. Perhaps the blow line, appealing as it did to human frailty, died harder. The Houghton *Chronicles*

THE TEST IN HISTORY

mention it in 1884: it lingered till the 'nineties here and there. I never saw it used. No, the dry fly came, and conquered both it and the sunk fly. Everyone thought it would rule for ever. Its advantages are so obvious. Its imaginative appeal is so powerful. If you had told any enthusiast of the 'eighties that within a generation the sunk fly would be back on the Test he would have laughed.

And yet it has returned, and the underwater fly or nymph is used more and more. Nymph fishing is no new thing. Marryat dressed artificial nymphs: and moreover many of the old flies, particularly hackle ones, are no doubt taken for them. But in the bright dawn of the floating fly's success the sunk counterpart was condemned. A large march brown or a large alder were sometimes fished downstream, sheepishly and shamefacedly. But nine fishers out of ten relied entirely on the fly which floats. Imitation got better. Spent spinners were dressed. Flies got smaller and smaller. But all were intended to float, and it was not until Mr. G. E. M. Skues produced *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* in 1910 that underwater fishing was again systematized. He worked out several patterns, using the old dressings: but later both he and others have turned their attention to a more exact copy of the nymph than the old hackle or winged fly provided. Hence comes the modern school of nymph fishing. It is, no doubt, a return to the sunk fly. But it is an advance at the same time. It is the old problem in a new setting. It is a fresh and entrancing chapter in the ever moving history of trout fishing.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

It is this variety which fishing shows which is its great charm, and it is this which has attracted distinguished men to the sport. Many such men have fished the Test. Sir Humphry Davy asked to be admitted as an extra member of the Houghton Club for the grayling fishing alone. It sounds like asking to be invited to Leicestershire for the rat hunting. Chantrey helped to start the club, and Landseer and Sir Francis Grant were visitors. So indeed was Turner, and his sketches are still in the club journal. Alfred Denison, the great collector of fishing books, belonged, and also a William Beckford, a cousin of the eccentric author of *Vathek*. Then Lord Lucas was a member, the brilliant and the attractive, whose many-sided and gallant life ended all too soon in 1916. And to go further back, Palmerston lived and fished many years at Broadlands. And in our time Lord Grey of Fallodon has sometimes deserted his beloved Itchen in order to visit it. Izaak Walton must have known it, and Andrew Lang fished at Whitchurch. Halford, the historian of the dry fly, frequented it and so did Francis Francis, and one who must have been the greatest fisher of all, George Selwyn Marryat. Many are the names which crowd the memory. Here have come in recent times two great American fishers, George La Branche and Edward Ringwood Hewitt. There is an older name which must not be left out, because it is of a man who, though no fisherman, loved Hampshire deeply, William Cobbett. I feel I know him so well that I can see him: see him getting on his horse at Hurstbourne Tarrant before daylight, and riding down

THE TEST IN HISTORY

the valley to Stockbridge, a tall burly man, with a weatherbeaten face and white hair, stopping at mid-day at an alehouse for a bite of bread and cheese, asking questions of everyone, noting the miserable wages of the labourers, and never failing to pick out a pretty girl. His keen eyes are always on the land he passes: noticing who sows swedes in drills and how the wheat is looking this year: observing that rye and vetches and sainfoin are splendid, but that barley will be a poor crop: cursing stock-jobbers and paper money and the memory of Pitt and parson-justices and dead-weight debt and the barren heaths of the New Forest: but loving the cultivated valleys and the windy downs and the herds of cattle and the flocks of sheep and the level cornfields and the thick water-meadows, with the deep love of those who spring from the soil. He was a bitter man and an unscrupulous one, was William Cobbett, and small wonder, for he was persecuted for his political opinions, ruined, imprisoned, obliged to fly to France and to America. But nothing subdued him. He forgot nothing and forgave nothing. He wielded a terrible cudgel, and so long as he broke a head he was not very careful whose it was. It is just over a hundred years since he started his *Rural Rides* and there is no better, or more dreadful, account of southern England in the years which followed Waterloo. Labourers' wages were six shillings, their houses were hovels, and prices were high. Cobbett fought their battle and the battle of the farmers: he had a soft spot for landlords too, provided they were not parsons or loanmongers, and above all if they planted the acacia, his beloved

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

locust tree, which he belauded above all trees of the earth. He, the first radical, never missed a day's hunting wherever he went: and, though regarded in his time as far more dangerous than a bolshevist is now, he was in reality English of the English. It is difficult to believe that there is not some remote down or sheltered valley still haunted by that unquiet spirit.

So much for the trout. I have tried to sketch his history on the Test from early times to to-day. But he is not the only sporting inhabitant of its waters. Salmon are still plentiful at and below Romsey. In old days they came much higher up, and still do so in seasons of great waters. As late as 1894 they spawned as high as Chilbolton, and no doubt in big floods they will continue to be found there or even farther. There has been a long and acrimonious quarrel between those interested in salmon, who want to open more of the river for spawning, and those interested in trout, who regard salmon as keepers regard foxes; but the quarrel was composed a few years ago, and peace reigns. The salmon territory now extends from Romsey to the tideway: it is only four or five miles long, but marvellous good for its extent. Below it are the nets, which are valuable. Above Romsey the Test is a trout river. But I wish it were only a trout river. I wish grayling could be disposed of as satisfactorily. It is tragic to think that her sunny shallows were free from that unexciting animal until about 1816, when they were introduced from the Avon. They soon spread. In April of that year Durnford took one at Chilbolton, the first he

THE TEST IN HISTORY

mentions; and before long the river was packed with them. Opinions differ; but, if you took a census, I believe a large majority of Test fishers loathe the sight of them. On many fisheries they are treated as vermin and regularly netted out. Whether their presence diminishes the number of trout is disputed: but really the matter is not arguable. It must. And I will give an example. The Cumberland Eden when I first fished it in 1889 had not a grayling in it. It had glorious trout and glorious salmon, and nothing else—save a few chub that hung about the still pools, were regularly poisoned every spring, and bothered nobody. Then in the early nineties some nameless malefactor turned three brace in at Kirkby Stephen. They spread, and now swarm. Since then the trout fishing has just about halved in productiveness: formerly forty fish was an ordinary good day: now you are lucky if you get twenty. I do not say that you may not sometimes get more, but then in the old days you sometimes got more than forty. Other factors may have contributed, but grayling are the chief cause of the falling off.

Such is a short and, I well know, incomplete history of this great river. Chalk streams are regarded by their admirers with an affection which is as unreasoning as true love ever should be, and of all such streams the Test commands their deepest devotion. To appreciate its full individuality you have to go to the middle or lower reaches. The higher stretches are delicately beautiful, but you must go down about to Wherwell before the special qualities of the Test are apparent. These

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

are its broad valley, the chalk cliffs which border it, the swing and rush and depth of the river, and its strong, clear volume. Most people think that Hampshire streams consist either of thin shallows, spread wide between flat meadows, or else of still, almost streamless depths, and it is a surprise to find that the Test is strong and quick and deep. And, in spite of all the damage which man has done and is doing, it still keeps its character. Perhaps, to those who can look back so many years as I can, it has deteriorated. On the whole the hatch of fly is less plentiful, for you do not so often see now those great volumes which were common thirty years ago. But I am satisfied that small fly is increasing and mayfly is quite as thick as any angler could want. In the upper reaches, too, trout are less abundant. Lastly, I am convinced, though the conviction rests on fallible personal observation, that the water is not as clear as it was. In order to appreciate the change, you have only to look at one of its pure tributaries, such as the Bourne, and you can then realize what the old Test was like. It was not so much that the water was stainless: many streams are that, such, for instance, as the Dartmoor brooks: but it was as if it possessed a crystalline quality of its own, different from all other water. The colour of weeds and stones and gravel, seen through its medium, was not only not dimmed, but acquired an added brilliancy and radiance. This you do not see now, and in fact even the upper Test is now slightly tinged with colour. But still, in spite of the wear and tear of time, in spite of man and his many iniquities, the essential Test remains

THE TEST IN HISTORY

to us. She is still the greatest trout river in the world: and it is to be hoped that this present generation will hand her on unspoilt to their successors.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

The Seasons, surely in these northern climes,
Laugh at their image drawn by modern Rhimes.
For spring oft shivers in the British Isle,
But warms, in British song, with Baia's smile.

The Anglers. By DR. THOMAS SCOTT. 1758.

THE SPRING OF 1924 WAS BLACK AND COLD. BY the beginning of April few flowers and leaves had succeeded in the hard struggle, and indeed I have known the north of Scotland more forward than was the Test valley. Through the first half of the month we had bitter north winds, frequent hail and occasional snow. A miraculous change came just before Easter, and for four or five days from the 18th the conditions were like June. Then the fine weather broke, and there followed a series of gales, lasting till nearly the end of the month, culminating in a regular hurricane on the 27th. Now, it so happens that these conditions combine all the elements adverse to fly fishing. Extreme cold in early spring may bring up fly, but makes trout lethargic. Very hot weather means a poor hatch, and so do gales. Thus our three types of weather were all unpropitious; but of the three, the cold spell at the beginning was best, for at any rate there was fly, and without fly you are defeated, since even

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

the accommodating trout of the Test cannot rise at nothing. Still, there were many occasions when fly was abundant but hardly a trout moved, and on the best days you did not have the chance of many fish, often only two or three; and you had to be lucky if you landed a brace of these, and they turned out to be over the limit of a pound and a half. In the hot weather the surroundings were delightful, but fly very scarce. And the days of gale were the worst of all.

I fished at Mottisfont on eight or nine days in April, somewhat unsuccessfully it is true, though I got some good trout. An exceptional number of bungles were made, and some very heavy fish were lost, one, which I shall always regret because he cannot have been less than three pounds, defeated me after a long fight in a manner which I cannot bear to recall. However, though rewards were small, the days were interesting. The rise was usually concentrated and short, the trout were particular about pattern, and fine gut had to be used. 26th April was a day typical of many. There was a wild wind from the south-east, heavy rain until one o'clock, and it was cold. But, when I started out, even under these unpromising conditions, I did not despair. At any rate, I said, the day was better than the one before. Then the wind had blown from the south-west, masses of inky black, rain-soaked clouds had scurried in succession across the sky, and there was that uncomfortable heavy feeling in the air beloved of our forefathers but which is the worst in the world for the floating fly. The present day was much better, for the air was nimble,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST



MOTTISFONT

and if it had a bite in it, why the large dark olive of spring is a lover of cold. Sure enough, at half-past twelve, summer time, the first olives appeared, and they were large and smoky grey, flickering delicately in the gale, tempting food for winter-starved stomachs. But, as usual, the fish paid no notice at first: so when it grew too cold to sit still any longer I walked up, eyes roaming over the water.

At last there was a movement under my bank; it might be a rat, but let us try my dark olive quill; its size was 0, and my gut 3x. The first cast was swept wide by the wind, but at the second there was a confident rise and a good fish careered down stream. The river was fairly clear of weed, the current ran full and strong, and after a merry fight I netted a fat fish, not two pounds in weight it is true, but well over the pound and a half limit. I walked up, and suddenly, without preparation, unexpected and wonderful as it always is, however

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

often you see it, the real hatch started. Olives were coming down thick, in little bands of half a dozen or so, blown together by the wind, and trout were rising quietly and quickly and continuously, all up the river, three or four of them within reach, and good fish too. There is a quality of magic about these early spring rises. The river looks dead and lifeless, and this impression is heightened by the bare meadow and the leafless trees. The stream runs with a dull lead-like surface, which nothing disturbs and apparently nothing ever will disturb. You expect a rise and it does not come, and then suddenly, when you have given up expecting, trout start moving simultaneously as though the signal had been passed round. At one moment you see fly after fly sailing down untaken, and you think nothing will ever break the unbroken surface: at the next the river is alive with rings of rising fish. It has come to life, and the sturdy vital trout, which a moment ago were hidden so completely that you doubted their existence, have mysteriously reappeared. I crawled to the bank, knelt down and watched. There were five fish within reach, and I looked eagerly to see which was the best. This period of expectation, when fish are well on the feed, is one of unmixed happiness. When action begins, when you have to cast, you may put the trout down, or you may break, or make some other dreadful bungle: but in the stage of exciting anticipation, when you see that great trout are to be caught if you can catch them, any extravagant success is possible and your pleasure is unalloyed. However, I did not spend as long as it takes to write

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

this in deciding, for near me, and above, a big fish was swallowing olive after olive, almost in perpetual motion. I was rather too close to him, but the wild wind ruffled the water, and concealed my presence: I put my dark olive over him three or four times: I made certain he would take, but he did not, though he went on steadily eating natural fly. What is the meaning of that? Another fish was rising, opposite me, smaller but takeable, as was a third, higher up in the middle, and I could reach each without putting line over the first. I was not sure about the size of either, but I must know if my pattern is right. They both disregarded it. When it was certain that all had seen and neglected it (and as usual I kept in on too long) I reeled up and knotted on a medium, not dark, olive quill, a size smaller. The effect was immediate. I floated it over the first fish, he rose, but I think I struck too quickly. Anyway, I did not hook him, alas, for he was heavy. Next I tried the one under the opposite bank. He took at the first cast, and I pulled him downstream, out of the way, and netted him out. He also was not two pounds, but he was some ounces bigger than the first I had killed. Then I crawled back to my position: two or three fish were still rising, not perhaps so madly as at first, and I was perfectly certain they would not go on long. Quickly I picked out the best and, after considerable trouble with the wind, managed to get a fly to him. He took, made a gallant, hard run, but then came off: the wind was so strong and wild that it was impossible to keep the line taut, and I lost him, the best fish of the morning,

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

without a doubt. Then all was over. The rise, the concentrated part of it, had lasted barely half an hour. I ended up with two trout, no great bag, but a brace that weigh not far from four pounds is something.

This indeed is the peculiarity of early spring rises, that they start and end suddenly. You are lucky to get a fish before they begin: when they end, you can go home. Whilst they are on, fish are not difficult, provided there is not too much fly: but you very rarely do well when your artificial has to be a member of a drove of naturals, for the competition is too severe. But, in these short April rises, you have no time for bungles or disasters or changes of fly: if you are to do well, your fly must be right to begin with. And this is not so simple as it sounds.

Hampshire was backward in April 1924. Not a kingcup was out, not a sign of white appeared on the dark twigs of the blackthorn, not a glint of green on the willows. And this is not favourable for sport, for my experience is that the earlier the season the better you do. If you were back from France in 1918, and keep a diary, turn up the month of April, and you will see that that spring was a full month earlier than the spring of 1924. It was a very good April. I got fish from the beginning, and I well remember two days towards the end, days which are symbolic of the conditions required for spring fishing. The 29th April was a hot, summer-like day, cloudless, with a light variable breeze. There was a bad patch of olives, and a poor rise. With difficulty I got a brace of fish. The following

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

day was the greatest contrast imaginable. There was a savage north-east wind, a heavy shower in the morning, the sky was overcast, and the air freezingly cold. I was on the Kennet, and went out at half-past ten, but nothing stirred till mid-day. Then I got three, one after another, in rapid succession: there were a few olives out, and fish took a blue quill, size o. I had by then reached the top of the water, a broad, deep weir pool, with a rushing stream through the middle, and whirling eddies and backwaters at its head. In one of these, in a small, slow whirlpool, a big fish was lying low down, busy feeding on nymphs. I put on a greenwell's glory, wetted it, and after several casts managed to get it over him; he took, and rushed straight down to the tail of the pool. When I got down to him he rushed up, and I rather weakly allowed him to get into a patch of weed; but the water was shallow, I waded out, cleared my line, and the fish bolted into a second patch and from there into a third. I could wade out to that, and could see the fish lying in the weeds. Then I did a silly thing: instead of clearing the line or hand-lining him out, I tried to net him in the weeds. The result was that I missed him, he dashed out, and the hook came away. He was a fish between two and three pounds.

Chastened and pensive, I walked down to a sheltered spot to eat my sandwiches. As I had been playing the big fish, I had noticed more olives coming down, but now suddenly they appeared in droves, one of the largest hatches I have ever seen. A few fish rose, but only tentatively: I kept on my blue quill, and after considerable casting, for the

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

trout were not taking one natural fly in twenty, I managed to kill two fish and returned an undersized one. After that not a fish moved, so I sat down to my sandwiches, watching the water. The weather was as inclement as ever, a raging north-east wind, and bitterly cold, but still olives sailed down in fleet after fleet. Caught by the northerly wind they were driven in packs into the southern bank, where they lay in all the little bays and curves of the shore, hardly floating with the current, and indeed often driven upstream by a more furious gust than usual. I expected every minute to see a quiet rise in one of these bays and a trout cruising about, picking the motionless fly off the water, but nothing happened. Three o'clock came, the wind grew colder and the fly thicker, but not a trout broke the surface and reluctantly I felt that it was hopeless, and there was nothing for it but to go home. Walking slowly back, watching the water intently, at last I saw what I had so long expected, a quiet rise and a good trout swimming around, swallowing fly after fly. He was on the lee shore, in the glass edge, in quite smooth water, cruising in an area of three or four square yards, making no more break than a minnow. Such fish are difficult, for you cannot always see where they are and make sure that your fly goes over them, and you are very likely to put the line across them, and then all is up. That particular fish I put down, but there was another small rise above. At the first cast I got hung up and lost my blue quill, which was a good thing, for it was too big, and I knotted on a Lock's fancy, size oo. No use, so I reeled up and tied on a hackle olive, oo,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and this after many casts he took and I killed him. Then I rose and missed two more (you have to strike very slowly with these gentlemen), killed two, and rose and missed another. All this meant a lot of careful casting, and it was then six o'clock and the rise over. So I finished up with eight fish: a good day.

Now these two days were the opposite of each other; the first, fine and hot, produced hardly any fly and two fish, and the second, bitterly cold, showed an immense hatch and four brace of fine trout. Never, never believe that cold weather hinders fly. You will hear it, always and everywhere; but it is not only untrue but the reverse of truth. Except at the very beginning of April, you get more fly on a cold day than on a warm.

A good many Aprils have been spent after salmon, or after trout in northern waters, far from the Test. The great lesson which April trout fishing in these streams teaches you is never to despair. Fortune may suddenly change, and you never know what your bag will be till you have reeled up: and indeed I have actually done this and started for home, tired and dispirited, when I have been tempted back to the water, with the result that the basket which was light at five o'clock has been so full and heavy at six that my shoulder has ached agreeably under the weight. You get this on chalk streams, too, but not so often. You may get a fall of spinner as late as six o'clock or even seven. But on most days you are dependent on the hatch of duns, and this hardly ever starts later than three o'clock: in fact rarely as late, for from eleven to one is the usual

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

time for it to begin. If I had to choose an hour in April, it would be between twelve and one. But though I have often wandered afar from Hampshire, I have many recollections of April in the south country as well as in the north. It is not one of the best of fishing months, but the Test valley shows then an individual beauty which is missed by those who do not start till May. Not many flowers are out, it is true, and the forest trees are still leafless: but there is a wash of green on the willows, the banks are tufted with primroses, and the kingcup makes broad patches of liquid gold over the meadows. This flower is a great favourite of mine, with its bowls of clear yellow and its dark glossy leaves. It has a bold, vigorous growth, typical of spring. It is at its best when it first flowers, for later on it gets ragged and straggly. Every day, also, the summer birds are arriving and one by one you can greet them all again. But the chief joys of April are anticipation and the sense that you are getting something for nothing. All the best of the year is in front of you, and you have not used it up yet. However bad your luck, nothing is wasted. The real season has not begun. And so, if you do get a good day, it is something additional and unexpected, something that was not in the programme, a pure gain, unlooked for and welcome: and if you get a bad one, there is no loss. It is this, and the delicious beginning of flower and leaf, which make April so enjoyable.

The Angler's Year may be divided into three stages. The first runs from the opening down to about the middle of May. It is marked by rises

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

which begin and end suddenly: those of April are often quite short, but they lengthen gradually as May is reached. In the earlier part you depend chiefly on the daily hatch of duns, first of olives, later of iron blues as well, and later still of pale watery duns also. But do not neglect either spinners or nymphs. Always keep looking at the water to see if spinners are coming down. Try bulging fish with a rough olive, or your favourite nymph, or, what is best of all, an orange partridge. Look out for smuts, also, for they appear even on cold days. Above all, waste no time. You do not, either in April or in early May, find those casual risers which move at something all through the long June days. As the afternoons grow lighter, trout begin to eat spinners more and more, and there are signs of the evening rise starting, whereupon the first stage of the Angler's Year ends. Then on the lower Test comes the mayfly interlude: after that the second stage, with the typical long drawn out hatches of duns, beginning and ending in more indeterminate fashion than those of the first stage, the falls of spinners, the evening rise, smuts, and sedge fishing. This lasts till some date in mid-August, and after that comes the third stage of the Angler's Year, running until the end of the season.

Now, it will be obvious that both the fisherman's day and the flies he uses will be governed by these considerations. In early April most is done during the hatch, and since that hatch is short the one essential thing is that the angler should be at the right place at the right time and with the right fly. There is no room for the leisured experiments of

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

June. But, as April runs towards May, and more especially during May itself, after the iron blue has appeared, you will do as much with the spinner as with the dun. The female iron blue spinner is a mighty favourite with trout. In fact in some years fish do not get really on to spinners until they have had a good meal off the spent iron blue. And, of course, nymphs will be taken right through the period. That great Test fly, the caperer, only appears at about its end, but you must always be on the watch for it. It is a marvellous good fly.

I consider the best early spring fly to be a blue upright, ribbed with gold wire, and you can use as big a hook as No. 0 on a wild April day. The dark olive quill, the gold ribbed hare's ear, or greenwell's glory all kill well. The variant, also an imitation of the dark olive, does not to my fancy do well till later. And you must never think that, though it is early April and blowing or raining or both, trout are not particular about pattern, for often they are. More and more, as years go on, do I use hackle flies. I have killed numberless trout on the hackle dark olive quill, but of late the blue upright has superseded it.

As May draws nearer, duns get smaller and lighter in colour, and your hook can be No. 00, or, if that is refused, 000. Your blue upright can be dressed without gold wire. If this is refused, my first change would be to a dressing which has a brown or ginger hackle, such as a ginger quill. Had I to choose one fly for the whole year, it would be a ginger quill. A tup will often be successful, especially on a hot, still day. And, for those who

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

like it, the alder appears, but it is not a fly I often use. On the other hand, I use the welshman's button (the caperer of the Test) increasingly. It appears at the beginning of May, and both the winged and hackle dressings are very useful.

Imitations of spinners are exceeding hard to find, for most of those sold in the shops are worthless, whilst Halford's dressings, fairly good for olives and pale wateries, utterly fail to reproduce the glowing flame of the sherry spinner or the burning red of the female iron blue. However, this is to anticipate. No spinner, early in the season or late, equals Lunn's particular. In fact, I believe it to be the best fly in the world. It imitates admirably the spinner of the olive. And as soon as the iron blue has appeared, use the houghton ruby. It is a magnificent imitation of the female spinner. Mr. Skues, too, should be consulted, and so should a new book by Mr. Dunne, *Sunshine and the Dry Fly*.

In April and early May, you find the best fish in quick, rather deep, water of the main river. Not many are on the shallows as yet, or in still deeps, or in eddies, or in carriers. But as the weather grows warmer, they move into the thinner water. The first hatches of dark olives often bring up large and wary trout, and you may hook something unexpectedly heavy.

CHAPTER III

THE IRON BLUE

Little blew dun. Made of the Down of a Mouse for body and head, dubt with sad Ash-colour'd Silk, wing of the sad coloured feather of a Shepstare quill.

The Angler's Vade Mecum.

By JAMES CHETHAM. 1681.

Earliest dressing of the iron blue.

IT WAS AS COLD A MAY DAY AS I REMEMBER. THE sky was a dirty grey, a wild gusty wind blew from the north, and the young green of the trees seemed to have lost all freshness and brilliance. The Test ran swift and full, but even its clear water looked dark, dull and forbidding.

Not a fish showed till two o'clock. The morning passed without a sign of life, and the weather if anything grew worse. I ate my sandwiches walking, to keep warm. At last a fish did actually rise, but it must have been due entirely to light-heartedness, for there was nothing to rise at. However, he took a blue upright ribbed with gold wire and proved on landing to be nearly two pounds in weight. An unenterprising animal: but I was cheered to get him. Time was running, and it was something to save a blank, for assuredly no day ever looked more like a blank. After landing him, I

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

began to walk upstream. Only one other rod was out, he was far below me, and there were four empty beats above mine. Better move towards home, thought I: perhaps things may be more prosperous above: anyhow nothing is lost thereby, there is good fishing all the way. So up I walked slowly, watching the water like a hawk. Three o'clock came, the gale was more violent than ever, and colder. Even my optimism began to desert me. And then, unexpectedly, things began to happen.

I forget what it was that first attracted my attention, probably the splash of a fish, for the water was whipped into such waves that flies and even rises were hard to see. At all events, I suddenly realized that the river, as if by magic, was speckled with iron blues. Blown sideways by the gusts, hurried downstream by the wild wind, children of the storm that they are, on they came, their narrow purple wings looking too delicate to live out the gale, ever more and more of them, till every square foot of the surface carried them. And, equally suddenly, trout began rising, good trout, and rising strongly and well, as they always do in a downstream wind.

All this takes longer to tell than it did to experience. I crept up to a rising fish, knelt down, and began lengthening my line. Oh that wind! It was not even dead in my face, it was right into my shoulder, the hardest of all against which to throw. But the first cast that went near my fish he took, and rushed madly downstream, my reel screaming. I had to take him a long way before I got him out, a beauty of 2 lb. 1 oz. That was better. A brace.

I walked quickly back to where I had hooked him,

THE IRON BLUE

and looked up. Then I saw that provided I made no mess of it, I might do great things. Just above me was a pool, very deep, with a swift turbulent stream coming in at right angles at the head and a quicker run also at right angles below. You know the sort of pool: full of swirls, eddies, and cross currents, inhabited by large and experienced trout, who roam about, now rising in the backwater, now in the current, then moving into almost still water, and eating half a dozen nearly stationary flies. On a calm day, you can catch them, if you see or guess which way they are turning, and drop your fly almost on their nose, putting it right into their mouths. But to do this you must cast very accurately, you must be at the top of your form. Moreover, you must cast very often: for owing to the different currents running in all directions, your fly will only float an inch or two without drag: and before it drags you must whip it off and cast again: for cunning trout must never see drag, never, never. All this constant casting is very tiring, even when all is in your favour, on a calm day. It is much more so with a wind against you, for accurate placing is infinitely harder, and you have to take three or four throws to do what you should do in one.

So difficult did it seem that I halted a moment, in quick indecision. Should I tackle this water, holding big trout, but horribly difficult in a head wind, or should I move on to the even-flowing beat above? The question was settled for me. A fish rose just where the quick run left the pool, on the very lip, and if ever I saw a fish between 3 and 4 pounds it was he. No fisherman could possibly

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

leave such a prize. After several bad shots, I got the fly in front of him; he rose confidently, I struck, but too quickly, and missed him. I waited, cursing myself: but after a minute, yes, there he was rising again, rising again regularly. I had not pricked him. I nipped off my blue upright and knotted on a winged iron blue. This floated beautifully over him. He rose again, and this time he was hooked. He made one bolt up into the pool, jumped, then turned and rushed down the racing stream below. I ran back into the meadow to keep the line taut, but he came so fast that it got slack. I reeled furiously, felt the fish, off he careered again, but my line brushed against something, underwater weed no doubt; only a touch, but it was enough, he was off. What a tragedy.

It was no use lamenting. Mechanically I took off the iron blue, and tied on a blue upright again. I walked back to where I had hooked him. Fly was thicker than ever, chiefly iron blue, but also large winter duns, small dark olives and medium olives, a wonderful sight, only to be seen on a chalk stream. Something moved far over the river. The throw, being across the wind, was easier, but I laid the fly down too hard and it sank. He took it all the same. I pulled, and felt fast as a rock. He also dashed downstream, but I could keep the line tight, I ran down and got below him on a short line, and we fought out a desperate battle over 100 yards of water. A lovely trout, 3lb. 7oz., a picture to look at.

But I wasted no time admiring him. Several were rising in the swirly water, and would un-

THE IRON BLUE

doubtedly take if I could get a fly to them. It was hard work to do this, and tiring, too, in that bitter wind: for with roaming fish you may put the fly off their tail instead of before their nose, many casts are needed even on a calm day, and even more on such a storm-swept water. I failed at three fish running, owing to drag and wind, thoroughly rousing their suspicions, but doing nothing more. Then I got one, well over the pound and a half limit.

By that time, all the fish in that particular pool had been either caught, risen, or frightened. It was possible, no doubt, to get another, or more than one: but that involved giving the pool a rest, and time was running. So I reeled in, and walked quickly up to the beat above. Here the broad shining Test ran straight, with a swift, even current and the problem would be easier. The fish, too, had had a mighty meal undisturbed, and at the same time had not had time to eat too much, and grow dainty and suspicious. But what was even better, the wind had fallen perceptibly. The fly still floated down steadily, less thick certainly, but in quite sufficient quantity.

The first trout I spotted was rising close under my bank. A left-handed cast, straight into the wind he was, and many were the throws I made before my fly, an iron blue this time, went right. He was lying above some tall dead grasses, and the shot had to be accurate, or the line bounced off the grass, and the fly blew wide. But at last he had it, and when struck bolted across the river, my rod bending double. I worked him down, and had my net off the sling to net him, when all unexpectedly the fly

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

came away. My next fish also escaped. When hooked, he rushed across the river in a succession of jumps, falling back into the water with a smash, and at the last leap he threw the hook. Both were heavy fish. Such things will happen. Next I wasted precious minutes over a fish which when landed proved to be just undersized, and I began to get anxious. The fly was growing scarcer, and the day was drawing in. After such a hatch, was I to return with only four trout? I walked slowly up, scanning the water. At last, there he is, right under the opposite bank, and a beauty too, for I can see him. In some ways, the cross-stream cast is the easiest, for if you are cunning and throw six inches short, the trout never sees your gut and will turn his head out to take your fly. And so it happened. I waited till he had turned back, and gave a good pull. It was long before this gallant fish yielded, but he did so at last. He weighed only one ounce under three pounds. And just as I got him out another fish put up his head in midstream, and he too was caught. I looked at my watch. It was six o'clock and all was over. I had bagged six fish, and under their comfortable weight I trudged happily homewards.

Now what, I said to myself, were the particular features of that admirable day? First of all, the hatch of fly. It is nearly forty years since I caught my first trout on the Test, and it is the fashion to say that the fly then was much more plentiful than now. This was undoubtedly true even five years ago: whether it is true now I feel doubtful. Certainly mayfly is very thick again, and not only

THE IRON BLUE

mayfly, for I am sure that the small fly is increasing too. Indeed, I have rarely seen a greater hatch. True, it did not last long, about three hours: but during the time it was on the river was covered. They are very wonderful things, these big hatches, one of the great events of nature. Oh, the Test is not decadent, I said to myself, it is still the greatest of trout streams. Next the weather. Most writers upon chalk streams tell us about sun and flowers and summer meadows. The iron blue loves none of these. He delights in rough and bitter winds, grey skies, and cold air. He rejoices in our hard northern spring. And the more he is buffeted, the more happily he rides out the storm. Lastly, when the iron blue is on, trout prefer it to any other fly. On this day there had been quantities of insects, amongst them that favourite food, the winter dun; yet I saw nothing eaten except the iron blue.

Thus ended the day, a day of hard work, and of failure mingled with success. What more can the fisherman desire? And what sport can compare with fishing?

●

CHAPTER IV
MAY AND THE MAYFLY

Pan doth pipe to us anew,
Reedy calls and catches,
So we'll go and throw a fly
Dainty, delicate and dry,
Forty miles from Waterloo—
Where the May-fly hatches.

The Trout Fisher

By PATRICK R. CHALMERS. 1914.

THE COMING OF THE MAYFLY IS MORE THAN AN incident in the fisherman's year. It is an event of nature. The sight of it carries the mind to other countries and throws it back to earlier times. Few of us are lucky enough to have seen the great movements of wild animals which still take place even on our restricted globe. The migration of the caribou in the Barren Lands of Labrador, the herds of antelope described by the old African hunters, even the incursion of swarms of the little lemming into Norway, are sights which not many can witness. But though, as continent after continent gets enclosed and cultivated, the range of animal life gets restricted, and many species languish or die, the air is still free to all. Its inhabitants can range at will. The air has no oceans and no continents, and it remains unfenced and unharvested. Even now, in

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

this populous land of ours and this civilized century, the migrations of bird life which occur every spring and autumn are nearly as great as ever they were. It is still possible for a slender bird like the chiff-chaff to pass the winter in Persia and the spring in Hampshire, and for the willow wren to travel every year the long road to and from Cape Colony. And in a humbler plane there still occur, every year, the birth, the life, the mating and the death of innumerable mayfly; and though it sounds a fanciful confession, I never look at the process without comparing it to those larger movements of more important creatures which I have not been so fortunate as to see.

It is in this spirit that I would have you approach the mayfly, and let me therefore announce the good news that it is increasing on the Test. Its history is a series of ups and downs, of growth year by year up to immense numbers, and then a gradual falling away until it almost disappears. Some of these processes we can follow. For instance, in 1853 it began to lessen at Stockbridge, as indeed it did also on the Hampshire Avon: in 1856 and 1858 it got fewer and fewer, and Halford in his *Autobiography* quotes a writer who in 1875 considered it doomed. But then it began slowly to increase, and by 1890 the hatch at Stockbridge was the greatest ever known. Then it got less once more, and by 1893 the Houghton Club were importing it from the tributary Dun, which flows in at Kimbridge, and in 1899 from the Kennet also. But this did little good, for the fly got scarcer and scarcer until in 1906 it was completely absent and, for the

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

first time in the club's history, not a single fish was killed on it. Many were the reasons assigned for this, and learned writers blamed late frosts, weed cutting, mud clearing and even swifts and swallows, forgetting, or perhaps not knowing, that the same thing had happened before. Anyhow, the fly was believed to be in process of extinction. Nor was the loss confined to the Test, for all south country rivers suffered, and on many a stretch of the Itchen where the fly was formerly abundant it became unknown. The disaster seems to have fallen somewhat later on the Kennet, for when I first fished at Hungerford, in 1901, mayfly was present in such countless thousands that it is difficult to believe it was ever more plentiful. But here too it began to diminish, and on some of the upper waters of that river it had disappeared entirely by about 1910. By then an added reason could be assigned, and there was dark talk of road tar and oil and petrol. But it began to reappear, and by 1922 was nearly as strong as ever. The same is the case with the lower Test: the hatch in 1924 was enormous, and anyone who saw the immense falls of spent fly which came down for several days round about 30th May—fly, be it noted, all of which had escaped the ravages of trout and swifts and had propagated their race—need have little fear for the future, provided no abominable poisons are allowed to pollute the river. The truth is that mayfly, like all wild species, is subject to cycles of increase and diminution of which we know nothing. These revolutions take many years to work out: we see a slow death and we shake wise heads and assign our puny causes:

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

but then again we see a slow rebirth, and we have to invent new theories, till finally we realize that we are in touch with a great fact of nature, working itself out on lines unknown to us. And, at the moment, let us be of good cheer, for the curve is an ascending one.

Mayfly fishing is proverbially uncertain. You get days when trout will take anything, when the most dreadful bungle will not put them down, and when they mind neither thick gut, bad casting nor wretched imitations. But such days are rare. Looking back over many years, I can only remember a few. And, to put against such days, I remember many more when trout were wonderfully difficult, when fish were feeding steadily and yet accurate and delicate fishing met with scanty reward. I am talking, be it noted, of days when all is in the fisherman's favour, when there is not too much fly and trout appear hungry and eager. But you have even greater obstacles to overcome when there is a glut of fly. Both the newly hatched and also the spent insect sometimes come down in masses which no one would believe possible who had not seen them. The water is covered, trout are not taking one fly in a hundred, your artificial has to float among droves of naturals, and there seems no imaginable reason why the fish should ever take it.

Now though the fly lasts a fortnight or more, and though on any of those fourteen days you may if you are lucky kill some heavy fish, there are not much more than two dates on which fishing is really good, and on the rest it is often most dis-

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

appointing. My experience has been so unvarying, that if I were told I was to have only two days' fishing during the period, I should choose my days with every confidence. I should ask the date on which the fly first hatched in quantities (and this date varies little from year to year, whatever the weather) and I should select either the fourth or the twelfth day after that. By the fourth day trout have acquired the taste of the newly hatched fly and are taking it confidently, no longer regarding it as a thrilling but somewhat alarming incident. The big fish are moving by then, and have not been much fished for and are not shy. Nor have they become satiated. Nor have they been pricked, as numberless fish are pricked during mayfly fishing. That is the first great chance, the fourth day. And the next is the twelfth day, by which time the fly is going off and trout know it, and are making the most of the short time remaining. They are feeding steadily on spent fly, and, moreover, the big fish who have been hooked and lost earlier have forgotten all about it and are on the move again. Your best chance of a big fish is either the fourth or the twelfth day.

In my experience this has worked out with a certainty almost mathematical. A few years ago I wanted to give some mayfly fishing to a friend, who had taught me dorado fishing in South America, and the date had to be fixed some time beforehand. On the water to be fished—not the Test—the fly appears on 5th or 6th June. Accordingly I arranged for us to go there on the 9th. We could not get on the river till eight at night, but we found

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

the fish rising madly, walloping at the fly, occasionally jumping to catch it in the air. They took anything, and hardly a rise was missed. We got ten fish between us in an hour and a half. And next day, my chosen fourth day, no fly appeared till seven, and yet my friend during a short rise got four excellent trout. The same thing happened at Mottisfont in 1924. The fly appeared in force on 20th May. Good fishing was had on the 24th, the fourth day, when a fish of 3 lb. 11 oz. was killed, and one of 3 lb. 14 oz. on the following day. Moreover, the only other three-pounder was got on the spent gnat on 1st June, the twelfth day from the beginning of the rise.

There is also a third occasion when you may get a big one, but it is an event about which it were wise not to prophesy, lest we be guilty of insolence. Do not expect it: if it happens, accept it with humility and gratitude. Sometimes a belated company of mayfly will drift down after the season is past, and then if all goes right—if these happen to come over a fish and if you happen to be there—you may catch something large. Trout have not forgotten the taste, and rise eagerly. I fished the Hungerford water in 1901. The first mayfly appeared on 30th May, the usual date, and the first good hatch was on 3rd June. By the 18th the season was considered over. Yet as late as the 22nd, when we were using red quills on drawn gut and trout were beginning to take an interest in sedges, by good fortune I chanced to be watching a place where a powerful fish had broken two anglers during the fortnight. Suddenly what should appear but mayflies, mayflies

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

in some quantity, freshly hatched and seductive, sailing down the slow current: and something which might be a big trout, or might be a small one, began to cruise about and eat them, one after another. By the time the third had disappeared I was nipping off my red quill and knotting on a mayfly, and before I quite realized what had happened I was playing a fish which seemed immense. He weighed 3 lb. 14 oz. That, however, was a piece of good luck which does not happen often.

Why is it that mayfly fishing, except on selected days, is so disappointing? I do not know, but it is. Partly, no doubt, it is due to too much fly. Fish get gorged, they allow natural after natural to float past them, and inducing them to take an artificial is a long business. Many casts have to be made, and the fisherman gets careless and makes a mistake, or when the rise comes at last it comes unexpectedly, and he strikes either too quickly or too hard, with dreadful consequences. I can assure the non-fisherman that it is exciting work attacking a fish whom you know to be over three pounds weight and who may take you at any moment. After an hour of such business your nerves get frayed, you are tired, and you may do something quite silly. But though I invariably do the wrong thing, I will tell fishermen what they ought to do, for I know what that is, though I do not do it. There is a fatality about fishing which makes most people, myself certainly, do what we know to be inept. Fishing faults are incurable. So though I shall proceed to lay down the law in pontifical fashion, pray do not think that I am one of those impeccable

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

individuals whom we read about, for no one sins so often against the light.

Strike slowly, you can hardly be too slow, and, if a floating fly is refused, try a hackle one, water-logged. Use fine gut. When I go into a London tackle shop and ask for a mayfly cast, I am continually astonished at what I am shown. Some of those produced would terrify a tarpon. On a fine, still day use 3x: as a general rule, 2x: on a very windy day, or at dusk, or when trout are mad, and it is silly to handicap yourself, you can put on something with which you can hold fish hard, and keep them out of weed. But never, if you take my advice, descend to a point thicker than 1x, and only use that occasionally. Many a salmon has been killed on finer gut. Why, just read a book which came out a few years ago by Mr. E. R. Hewitt, the *Secrets of the Salmon*. It is a revelation of what the dry fly will do for salmon in low water. He fishes sometimes with a point .004 diameter, on which he kills fish up to ten pounds. I reckon that gut of .004 inches is finer than 2x by our scale, so you need not be afraid of 3x: indeed he who cannot kill a three pounder on it "deserves not the name of an angler," to quote Charles Cotton.

But, when all is said, however good your tackle, whatever you do, however accomplished you are, and however long your experience, trout on the mayfly are extraordinarily hard to hook. This remains the eternal difficulty of the mayfly. I think the reason is partly because of the stiff whole-feathers with which most patterns are winged. If you change to a soft hackled variety you often

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

hook more. A stiff fly is hard to suck in. Partly too, no doubt, the difficulty is due to the fact that so large an insect takes time to eat: partly to the trout's fear that it is something dangerous: and partly, perhaps, to his over anxiety to secure it. But a sedge is as large, and more difficult to catch, and with no fly do I hook so many rises as with the sedge, while with no fly do I miss so many as with the mayfly. With no fly do you get so many false rises. Some of them are not rises at all, for though the fish comes at the artificial, often with a splash and a wallop as though he had been looking for it all night, he never really takes it in his mouth. Or he seems just to mouth it, not closing his jaw firmly. Or he takes hold and quickly lets go. And the strangest part of the business is that he will vary his habits, even during the same day.

In the life cycle of the mayfly there are three occasions on which trout devour it: the first when, newly hatched, it sits on the water, the second when the female fly is laying her eggs, and the third when it floats down dying or dead. You get heavy hatches of the fly on the Test: but, large as they are, nothing on it, nor I believe on any other English river, can compare with the Kennet. The hatch of mayfly at Hungerford in the old days is difficult to write of without seeming to exaggerate. As you went down from London in the train you saw the river and carriers covered with fly as with a mist: the engine was plastered with their bodies: your carriage got full of them, blown in through the window: as you drove from the station your horse's hoofs stamped them into the road. I

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

remember particularly 7th June 1901. It was a warm cloudy day with a violent north-east wind. No fly appeared till six in the evening, but between then and nine they came up in incredible numbers. They floated down in flocks, almost touching: as you looked into the air the droves of them carried along by the wind gave you the impression of being out in a very heavy snowstorm: your clothes and your hat were covered: they perched on your rod: as you walked the bank you had the feeling that you were pushing your way: the greedy trout were gorged, and the greedier swifts retired replete. Nothing made any impression on their numbers. They were there in hundreds of thousands, and still they kept hatching out and still the surface got thicker and thicker with them.

You do not do much in these great falls. Indeed, the appearance of them paralyses you. Why, when trout are refusing thousands of natural insects, should they eat your clumsy imitation? But the mayfly season is full of continual surprises; the unexpected always happens. So I will give an account of two days, not unlike in character, but very different in result. The first was the 31st May 1924 at Mottisfont. On the previous evening trout had had a terrific gorge on spent gnat, and on the 31st I went down to the river expecting to do nothing until it came down again, but hoping to catch something then. And truly, at ten in the morning the river had a dissipated, "after the party" appearance. Two fish, lying near the top in the fast water of the Oakley Stream, refused mayfly and spent gnat, but took, capriciously enough,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST



MOTTISFONT

a jenny spinner: however, I do not think they meant business and neither was hooked. I then walked across to the main river, where I found a mass of fly life such as you rarely see out of a chalk country. Iron blues and pale watery duns were tripping down in little fleets, convoyed by an occasional tall mayfly, looking like some lateen-rigged piratical craft carrying off smaller vessels. Caperers, in their russet coats, were sitting on the surface or trying to reach the shore by short, clumsy jumps. In the reeds bordering the river were clouds of alders, restlessly flickering about, taking aimless journeys through the air, running nervously up grass stems, or tumbling into the water like careless children. But in spite of all this quantity of insects, there was a jaded air over the world of the river. An occasional fish rose, one, indeed, at an artificial mayfly, but was not hooked. Mayflies decreased, and iron blues increased, so I put on 4x

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

gut and a hackle iron blue, 000 in size; I rose a fish, landed and returned a small one, and then hooked and lost a very good one. After that an absolute deadness fell on the water and its inhabitants, and nothing stirred till two o'clock. At last I found a trout rising under my bank. He took my iron blue well, but I missed him: he did the same at an alder: but then, as I was waiting to give him time to recover, to my delight he ate a natural mayfly. Aha, I thought, you are mine. And so he was. I whipped off my alder and knotted on a partridge hackle mayfly, which he seized the first time it came over him, and was landed. He weighed 1 lb. 12 oz. Nothing else seemed likely to happen for some time, so at three o'clock I went home in order to have a meal and be able to stay out late. I started back at five; and long before I reached the river I knew the fly would be there in quantities.

As I walked there, all along the hedges, round the bushes, over the willows and the tall trees were clouds and clouds of the male fly, rising and falling in their dancing flight. They were like swarms of bees, seen everywhere as far as eye could reach, in numbers uncountable. Through the day you might have found them clinging to grasses or reeds or sedges, quiescent and torpid: but now at evening they had awakened and collected together and resumed their dances. The air was full of drifting female fly too, and as one was carried by the wind past any of these assemblages, she would immediately be seized and mated. When mated, she makes her way to water; for the last two stages, the laying of the eggs and the death, take place on

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

the river, and I should see them later. They had not begun when I got there. Instead a few of the newly hatched fly appeared now and again. The wind had dropped, the river world had come to life and lost its jaded look, and as I sat down to watch I felt confident that it would not be long before I was up and doing. Nor was it. A fish rose twice in midstream, and I caught him, then I missed two, then caught another and missed another. The pair I had captured weighed 4 lb. 9 oz. between them. But now it was past six o'clock: and the spent fly began to come on the water. All over the surface mayflies were to be seen; they were in clouds in the air above, busy egg-laying, now dipping down and just touching the top of the stream, then rising in the air, then dipping again. They got thicker and thicker, and so did bodies of dead mayflies floating down. If your eye followed an individual egg-layer, you noticed, if you could pick her out from the swarms of her companions, that her trips through the air got shorter, and her visits to the water more frequent, and that, instead of just brushing the surface in order to lay her eggs, she began to sit for a second or so upon it, until the time came when she could rise no more. Then, her work done, her store of six or seven thousand eggs safely laid, the future of her race assured, she settled on the surface and sailed down upright; but soon she would give a shiver, one of her wings would collapse on the water, until finally she died and fell flat, wings extended in the form of the cross. Thicker and thicker grew the mass of fly over the water, more and more numerous those carried down

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

by the current. At first those floating were present in all stages, sitting upright, or half collapsed, or dying, or dead: but soon the dead predominated, until all that could be seen were their bodies, the dead fly, the spent gnat. These came down in ever increasing quantities. In the backwaters and eddies they were packed nearly solid. In the main current, the quick swinging stream of the lower Test, they were separated only by inches. All the broad river was covered, and bore them seawards like a moving carrier. Now all these had escaped the attacks of trout and grayling, and swifts and swallows and martins and wagtails and warblers and chaffinches and many other birds which prey on them: all of them had escaped, and had reproduced their species: when you looked at the countless thousands which floated down in the small time during which you saw only a small part of the river, you realized that the quantities of them which had survived were so vast that the assaults of all their enemies made no appreciable impression on their number.

By seven o'clock on this day, therefore, I was in a happy situation. I had landed three fish, weighing well over six pounds. The spent fly was beginning to come down and the real rise to start. I had two hours of daylight ahead of me, and one of the finest stretches of the lower Test to fish. Can it be wondered that the capture of three more trout, to make up my three brace, seemed such a certainty that the only matter of speculation was what they would weigh? But how often do you seem on the edge of great things, and yet do not attain them!

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

How often do you believe you have surmounted the difficult part of your road and have your foot firmly planted on the land of desire, only to be thrown back and thwarted! And so it happened. Nothing else did I get. Though spent fly appeared in unimaginable numbers, very few trout rose. A short time before, when there was little fly, trout had eaten every one, and had taken every artificial put over them properly. Now, when an immense meal was provided, they suddenly changed, they only took one fly in a hundred and almost disregarded the artificial. In fact it was difficult to find any good fish rising at all. At last I settled down to a big one who took an occasional spent gnat. He took mine, but only after incessant spells of casting, of resting, and of fly drying, and after one of the valuable daylight hours had gone: and then I missed him, alas, alas! I struck too soon, probably. After that I spent some time over another, and did indeed hook him, but he turned out to be a big chub. And then the rise was over. Fate, I felt, was unkind: if I had to miss one, why could I not have missed the chub and hooked the trout?

The second day was 22nd May 1927 at Stockbridge. It was a good day, succeeding where the other day failed. It is described in the next chapter.

You usually get the heaviest hatches of new fly in the afternoon, sometimes as late as five o'clock. A big morning hatch is not so common. As a rule you can look for fly any time after four, and what with the newly hatched and the spent insect, you ought to be on the water from then until ten at

MAY AND THE MAYFLY

night. Now, some time you must eat something. If you go from breakfast till ten without anything except sandwiches, you get irritable and fish badly. At the same time it is maddening to miss the rise for a wretched meal. After some experience I have found the safest time to be away is between three and four, summer time. By three the morning hatch should be over, and by four the afternoon one has not begun. So, if you take my advice, you will eat little luncheon, and will have a real meal at three o'clock. It sounds barbarous, but you have no idea how soon you get used to it.

It is hard to write with any confidence about patterns, and my advice is to carry a good many. Those with wings of light mallard, dyed green or yellow, or of dark mallard, undyed, are successful—and so are others. Perhaps the French partridge hackle fly is best of the hackle patterns. At any rate I kill more fish on it, but then I fish it more. But I often find that it pays to change your pattern constantly. If he refuses one, give him something quite different: it can do no harm, and at least you fish it with more confidence. The best patterns of spent gnat are the light grey ones, not those usually sold in the shops, whose wings are made of almost black hackles. And never forget that trout will sometimes take the caperer better than the mayfly.

Good or bad, disappointing or successful, a mayfly season is always enjoyable. You often have quite bad days. Fishing with olives is more amusing and more delicate. But the mayfly is more romantic. Anything may happen. Unknown

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

monsters may appear from the depths. The excitement is always kept up. Fishermen may despise it: it may be unscientific angling: but I sincerely hope it will last out my time. Apart from fishing, it is a spectacle of unrestricted natural life. Such sights are becoming so rare that we cannot afford to lose any of them.

CHAPTER V

A GOOD MAYFLY DAY

If the all-ruling Power please
We live to see another *May*,
We'll recompence an Age of these
Foul days in one fine fishing day:

We then shall have a day or two,
Perhaps a week, wherein to try,
What the best Master's hand can do
With the most deadly killing Fie

To my dear and most worthy Friend, Mr Isaac Walton.

By CHARLES COTTON 1689.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS WHICH MAY SOMETIMES brings. The sun shone, the sky was blue and silver, the breeze was light and the trees were all of a different shade of green. The water meadows were bright with flowers. The liquid gold of the kingcup was fading, but there were wide drifts of the delicate lilac of the cuckoo flower, whilst in the dryer spots rich yellow cowslips were mixed with dark purple orchis. The broad Test ran full and fast and stainless. I started at ten o'clock in the morning, knowing that at some time in the day the mayfly would appear.

For a time nothing happened. I strolled to the bottom of my beat, to have it all ahead of me. At last the first mayfly sailed down, followed by another

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and another. Still no trout rose. But at length there was a movement, though the fish was certainly under water. I put on a hackle fly, wetted it and cast two feet above him. The fly fell softly on the smooth surface, and gently disappeared, dragging down a link or two of gut, inch by slow inch. The dry part of the cast floated down, and I waited with that breathless expectancy which fishermen know so well. Then there was an almost imperceptible pull at the gut, a drawing of it over the polished surface, so slight that it might be due only to the quicker sinking of the fly, as the fish took me under water. I saw it, but saw it too late. I struck, but only pricked the fish, and with a swirl and a boil which showed how heavy he was he flounced off. Well, I ought to have caught that fish.

After that nothing hapened for a long time. The mayfly got scarcer and scarcer, till at last it ceased altogether. The breeze dropped, not a leaf moved, and complete deadness fell on the water. So calm was the air, so peaceful the river, that it was difficult to believe that mayfly would ever return or that the active bustling trout would ever rise at them. I sat under a willow, ate my sandwiches, and sat under a willow again. Reed warblers and sedge warblers chattered on the bank, larks sang, and a pair of redshanks swept past, uttering their querulous cry. At last, at three o'clock, a solitary mayfly appeared, followed by two or three, then more, then thicker and thicker, till finally I realized that I should witness that wonderful sight, a great hatch. Soon the water was covered, and the air full. They settled on my coat, on my hat, and on

A GOOD MAYFLY DAY

my rod. Trout, already gorged on the nymph, rose spasmodically only, and it was difficult to find a feeding fish. At last I spotted one, greedier than the rest, taking every fly that came. He would not take me, however: I gave him several casts, with a winged artificial mayfly, and I confess they were soft casts and delicate, calculated to deceive the cunning, and my mayfly swung over him a light as a rose leaf. But he knew the difference between my fly and the natural, for he continued eating real mayfly, now to the right and now to the left of my artificial. So I pulled in my line, and thought. An idea was running through my head. I nipped off my winged fly, and knotted on a hackle one, and did not oil it. The reason for this was to make it lie flat on the water. Since he would not take a fly which stood up like the real thing, let him have something quite different. I cast. My fly fell among a little drove of living flies, utterly unlike them: but the cunning old trout for that very reason seized it. He seized it, I gave a firm pull, and knew he was big. We had a long struggle, but, as often happens with big fish, not an active one. He weighed 3 lb. 4 oz.

Then I found another, taking steadily and well, a big fish too. I gave him two or three casts, and then, through carelessness or ineptitude, I threw somewhat too hard and the fly went down on the water with a bang. That finished that trout: he stopped rising. I finally settled down to another. I had on the same fly; and though he refused it time after time, I did not change it, for I had a feeling that if he took anything he would take that. And

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

so he did, but not until nearly an hour had passed. At last he took, and away he went upstream, the reel screaming. We had a long, slogging fight, but in the end I lost him through folly. He was dead beat, I was impatient, I tried to pull him over the net, and pulled too hard. The hook came away. He was very large, alas, alas. Almost immediately after I caught one more. Now this fish would not look at the hackle fly; and instead of persevering with it as I did with the last fish, I at once changed it for a winged one. I did so because I put him down to be an individual of less astuteness and experience than the one I had just lost, and so for him an exact copy of the fare that he was eating was the best lure. The other trout, who had seen many exact copies of many flies and known their deceitfulness, was too superlatively wily to be taken in. No winged fly could pass his critical and dispassionate inspection, sharpened as it was by a continual view of the living article. No, give him something that had not to pass the test of comparison, and thus counter his extreme craftiness by apparent simplicity.

I caught one more, and then it was time to go home for a meal. I did not get back to the river till eight o'clock. On an evening such as this, fair and sweet, cloudless and windless, it was certain that the dead mayfly, the spent gnat, would be floating down the water, and there is no food of which trout are greedier. I started on a broad racing shallow, and at once a fish rose close under some bushes. I hooked him, and like most fish hooked on a shallow, he made a wild rush for deep water, in this case above him, and my reel was run

A GOOD MAYFLY DAY

down to the backing before I could stop him. Next he tried to dive head first into various thick beds of weed, but was frustrated and finally landed. I strolled up, with that delightful feeling that whatever happened the day was redeemed. I had caught two brace: if I got more, it would be an added satisfaction: if I did not, it would cause no discontent.

It was a long time before the next fish moved. He was in the deep water at the head of the shallow, he rose only once when I was some way off and then not again. But I thought I knew where he was, and after waiting a bit I began to get out line in order to cast over him. As I was lengthening my throw, and was resting the fly on the water some two yards below where I imagined him to be, a fish took with a splash and was firmly hooked. But he did not play strongly and when I saw him I was not surprised to find him undersized. Was this my fish? It is uncommonly hard to mark a rise when you are twenty or thirty yards below, and I might easily have been some distance out. Yes, I suppose it was. I half reeled up, preparing to move on, when a sub-conscious thought forced itself to the front. It said, think again: think of the rise you first saw: picture it in your mind: was that, could it have been, caused by the miserable pounder you have just returned? Think again, it said, and then cast again two yards higher. I lengthened my line, and was rewarded by a rise that made my heart glad. He weighed two pounds and a half.

By now dusk had come on, stars were in the sky

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and in the air bats had taken the place of swifts. All was over.

A wonderful day truly. Five trout, the smallest 2 lb. exactly, and the biggest 3 lb. 4 oz. Was there ever such a sport as fishing, or such a river as the Test? Going home, recalling the incidents of the day, all seemed symbolic. The very mistakes and misfortunes had their place and their necessity. And from the back of the mind, unobserved during the intense drama of the sport but returning with the cessation of activity, there arose a deep consciousness of the beauty of the background against which the contest had been enacted. The ageless outline of the down, springing from a time far earlier than man and man's cultivations, the grass with its wealth of flowers, the song of birds, the glancing water—all this entered into the inner chamber of the soul, giving a refreshment, a poise, a balance and a new life to intellect and to emotions which no other experience could offer.

CHAPTER VI

A JUNE DAY

Fish fly-replete, in depth of June,
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon.

Heaven. By RUPERT BROOKE. 1915.

THE YEAR 1923 WAS ONE WHEN OUR REMARKABLE English climate, which no one really likes who knows any other, had been more outrageous than usual. May and early June were phenomenally cold, and there had been little fly. Now, cold weather of itself does not mean a bad hatch of fly. Quite the contrary. If you cast your mind back, you will realize that you have never seen a big hatch, except either on a cold day or at evening after a hot one. You do not get it during the heat of high noon. But there is one kind of cold which affects the river world as it affects us. It makes the trout lie on the bottom and take a depressed view of life. And it influences the fly too. The sort of cold which brings it up is a lively cold and not a dead one. The air may have a nip, but it is bright and springy. When, however, the sky is one uniform, uncompromising, toneless grey, when the cold is hard and heavy, when there is no colour in trees and reeds, when even the clear and lovely water of the Test looks stained and dirty, then you generally have a bad time.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

Such had been the season up to the third week in June. But then there came a change. It got warmer. And one day towards the end of the month I was fishing at Longparish.

It was not a day you would have chosen. It was a windless calm, certainly, which makes fishing so delicate and so pleasurable. But there was a grey sky, all the same colour, and a slight, warm haze. The water, very low, was unnaturally smooth and clear, and in it the trout were unnaturally dark and conspicuous. Indeed, the transparent, almost moveless water looked like some other medium, and the solid, obvious trout stood out as though embedded in crystal. Still, somehow, I had the certainty there would be a rise. And the trout shared that opinion, for there were signs of expectancy about them, and instead of resting motionless they were "lying upon the fin," as an old seventeenth-century writer puts it, a quiver and a ripple running over them, and it was clear that things were going to happen.

I had had to motor over, and it was eleven o'clock summer time, before I reached the bottom of my beat. But all was well. There had been no rise yet.

Then I planned my day. There are two streams at Longparish: one, the main river, where I was; the other, half a mile away, the mill-stream, not so broad, but faster and deeper, a river in itself. I said, "I will stay where I am till twelve, and then, if nothing occurs, go to the mill-stream; but whatever happens I will be back here by one." The rise was to be expected about then; for be it

A JUNE DAY



LONGPARISH

noted that, contrary to an opinion widely held, a warm morning retards the hatch, and a cold one accelerates it. To-day being warm would mean a late rise.

And so it proved. Nothing happened till just before one. A light rain coming from nowhere pitted the water for a few minutes and then ceased as mysteriously as it had begun. A pair of red-shanks flew round from time to time, uttering their slender note. Reed and sedge warblers churred and jarred in the willows, and woodpigeons, and cuckoos now grown hoarse, made an agreeable background of sound. The mill-stream when visited showed only small fish, and the big fellows were no doubt snug in weed: the polished surface of the main river, undisturbed by a single ring,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

looked as though it had been ironed and that nothing could ever break its stillness. But neither the trout nor I abandoned hope.

Walking back to the bottom of the main river, I heard the first rise, and looking up saw that light yellowish coloured olives were coming down, not many, and few of those that came were taken. Never mind. When you can see your fish you do not want a great quantity of fly, and in fact you are better without it.

I put on one of the numerous variants of what our ancestors called the yellow dun: yellow silk body ribbed with fine gold wire, light ginger whisk, ginger hackle and medium starling wing; the size was 000 and the gut 4x. Almost at once I found a good fish rising. It was an easy place, a rippling run between weeds, and it was possible to wade nearly straight below. The first cast was short, the second just above him, but a foot and a half to my side of him.

Most fish would have left it alone. You can almost hear them say, "My friend, if you want to get me out, you must bowl on the wicket. I'm not going to cover your wides." Not so this gallant gentleman. He made a sideways lunge at it, coming right out of the water, showing all his glistening depth and length, and opening an immense mouth. Thank heaven I had the self-control to wait until that mouth was shut and his head down, before giving him a good pull. One who misses an appalling number of risen fish, either because he is too quick or too slow or because of some devilish and incurable ineptitude, experiences

A JUNE DAY

a more brilliant exaltation when he knows that on this occasion, at any rate, he has been less of a bungler than usual. Off the fish rushed upstream, tearing line from the reel, then across, then down, I reeling for dear life and not catching him up, until he dashed almost past my feet under a wooden bridge just below. Am I to lose him after all—lose the first heavy fish for some days? He was under the far bay of the bridge: the water was too deep to wade, indeed it would have needed swimming: to follow was impossible, and it was all I could do to keep the line off the pier. Things looked bad. But, but, remember: fish always make for a bridge, but nearly always stay under it. They like the shelter. They do not run straight through, either up or down, nor do they usually go up through one arch and down through another: though one large and intelligent individual once did this to me with a concentration which denoted much previous practice, and doubtless he has since repeated the performance. But usually trout have a pathetic and ostrich-like belief in the protective power of bridges. And so had mine. He got under and sat there. Slowly, with many ups and downs, I worked him out: and the rest was easy.

On looking up after landing him, fish were rising^{g 14} here and there, not many, nor often, but rising steadily. The water had become even lower and quieter, for more of it was being taken away to the mill-stream, and the surface looked smoother and more polished than ever. On such occasions, a still day, slow-flowing water, and crafty trout, there are two points every fisher should ram into

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

his head: first, do not let the fish see too much gut, and second, never let them see a dragging fly. It is not only that they will not take it, no well-brought-up trout does that; but the fact of seeing a fly drag, or of seeing gut, tells them that they are being fished for. This may not put them down: they may go on rising: they may take every natural fly which passes: but your fly they will not take.

The next two fish I missed. The first was hooked but got off after one rush: the second, struck too soon, was only pricked. The third, a better one, was rising at the edge of a weed patch. Above him the stream, held up by the square top of the weed patch, ran straight across the river, and then, turning the corner, rippled down its edge. There was a very fast current down close to the edge, but farther out, even by a few inches, it was perceptibly slower; for here the water had to make a wider sweep and circuit, and this reduced its pace. The trout was lying touching the weed, in the narrow runway of fast water. If a fly came over his head, he took it, scarcely moving. But he also noticed and took flies which floated down the slower water at his side. He swung out deliberately, for there was plenty of time, the fly moving so slowly; then he took a careful look at each, and, if he approved, ate it.

Now, when a trout takes two looks even at a natural fly, a fisherman expects trouble. He knows that his artificial must face a highly critical comparison. It must be a good imitation, must be cocked, and must not drag the least. It was difficult to avoid drag if your fly fell in the slower

A JUNE DAY

water I have described; for your line would be caught by the quicker run below, and you would have the exasperation of seeing your fly, after floating obediently for an inch or two, suddenly become possessed by some devil-sent energy which propelled it scuttering over the water like a wild duckling. At first sight, therefore, the better plan seemed to be to throw directly over the head of the fish, in the fast water. But there was an objection, and a fatal one: the fish was close to, touching, the weed: your fly must be close also: if you are a little off the target, and get caught in the weed, the least shake will send the trout off like an arrow. No, with all its difficulties, keep well away from the weed, and put your fly in the stiller water.

No non-fishermen can realize the excitement, often painful, which possesses you before you make a cast such as this. You are literally frightened. Of what, it may be asked, are you frightened? What is a trout, after all, and what does it matter if you hit or miss? Why all this fuss and pother? Why should such a trivial success or failure cause such deep emotion? Well, possibly we are, a foolish folk, and spend on trifles feelings which the wise reserve for more important events. All the same, there is not one of us who has not had the sensation, nor is there one of us who would be without it.

However that may be, the cast was made, and by the mercy of fate the fly for once landed just right. There it was, floating gaily in the slack water, cocked, and the line behind it was beautifully crooked to absorb the drag. And there too was

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

the trout, slowly turning himself out to look at it. He came out, raised his nose to it, and for what seemed an eternity backed down behind it as the stream carried it along; then he broke the water and took it. Once more I had the fortitude to wait until his head was well down again, indeed until he had turned to go back, before striking. I knew then that I had him firm. He was not much of a fighter and his mind did not rise above weed; I held him out of this, and it was not long before he was in the net.

What a happy confidence it gives you to have caught a brace. A brace! It sounds so well. So much better than twice one. Even if you get no more, even if you bungle innumerable subsequent chances, you can still give the impression of skill. And what is more, of skill joined to abnegation. You may be one of those curious folk of whom I hear, but never meet, who do not wish to catch more. Anyhow, your reputation is saved, and you can face the return home without a sinking heart.

The day was, if possible, now stiller than ever. Olives were coming down, but only sparsely. Few fish were moving, and it was some time before another takeable one could be discovered. At last he was found, rising in a little lake surrounded by weeds of all tints of green. It was not a difficult shot. I rose, but did not prick him, and he went on feeding. Then I managed to get caught up, the cast dragged and made ripples over his nose, and he flounced off in great indignation. Probably his suspicions had been aroused before.

A JUNE DAY

The next, rising a few yards above him, had a good, steady, concentrated look at my olive, and then deliberately turned away. When shy trout do this, I am convinced that you should change your fly at once—change it either for one of a different pattern or for a smaller one of the same or for one which is both different and smaller. If you do not, if you keep on passing over the trout's nose an imitation which he has already examined and rejected, he may end by taking it. He may. But what usually happens is that at the next cast he gives it half a look and at subsequent ones disregards it altogether. And there is the danger that the fact of seeing a suspected insect continually floating over him may make him discover he is being fished for. It often does. And remember, too, that the more casts you make the more likely you are to bungle one. So off with the fly at once. Do not make even one more throw. It is a bore to have to change a killing fly, but do not be lazy.

I put on a ginger quill, also ooo, but actually slightly smaller than the one I had fished with. He ate it as though he had been waiting for it since daybreak, made a long rush upstream, but was then brought back and netted.

Then again I lost two fish running, after having them on some time, both seemingly well hooked. Every fisherman in this particular year had the same experience. A large proportion of fish were either missed or hooked and lost. No one has yet given a satisfactory explanation of what "coming short" is. I suggest, though it is only a guess, that it is that the trout are not closing their mouth firmly

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

on the fly. Instead of taking it with a good strong decided gulp, they are feeding in a slack, lackadaisical, half-hearted manner. They take your fly, and mean to swallow it, but they swallow it nonchalantly, with half-open mouth. It is easy to understand that under such circumstances the hook only scratches them, or, if it takes hold, does so lightly.

The last trout of the day was lying where a few inches of water rippled over very dark weed, and owing to the reflection I could not see him or make out his size. I thought him a good fish, but that he was bulging, not rising. I believe he was: but he took me after four or five casts.

It is often said that Test trout do not fight, and speaking generally the charge is true. They are apt either to think of nothing but weed or to wallop and flop about, splashing up to the top and beating the water; but not making that hard, whirring rush for liberty, that succession of wild, reckless jumps, and those sudden and desperate dashes in which a north country trout indulges. But still I have met, often on the Kennet, and not seldom on the Test or Itchen, a trout fully as gallant and untamable as any the north can produce. This fish was one. When hooked he did not pause a second, but rushed straight upstream, tearing line off the reel, and occasionally shooting along the top of the water with all his back showing. I could do nothing but hold him lightly, shiver, and pray for luck. On he rushed, now and then slackening slightly and giving me hope I could get him back; but, as soon as I pulled, making another of those solid, irresistible

A JUNE DAY

surging runs which are the signs of a good fish. The line was flying off the reel; the fish was five and twenty yards above me: I had waded as far as I could follow: surely my gut must break with all that weight of line: and worst of all, I saw a few yards ahead of him a tangled mass of reeds, floating weeds and dead vegetation, which was evidently his home and which he was determined to win. Now or never. Will your 4x stand it? You must risk something to keep him out of that familiar jungle. Pull steadily, without the least jerk, slackening off as the fish pulls, but making up your mind you will get his head round before he reaches his lair. Just on its edge, I turned him. He lunged up to the top, smashing the water in a nerve-shattering manner: but his head was round, a good pull brought him some yards nearer safety and I could now reel in as fast as I liked. Down he came, sullenly lurching and swirling, not beaten, but I knew I had only to be careful. Just above where I stood the water was deep, placid and weedless: here the battle was fought to its long end and this gallant fish yielded at last.

That made up my two brace. They weighed over seven pounds. Two fish were caught on the olive which I have described, and two on a ginger quill. I had had nine chances and had landed four fish.

It was, perhaps, a difficult day and there was no reason to be dissatisfied. But what I want to impress on any reader who is not a dry fly fisherman is that dry fly fishing is much easier than it sounds. There is a conspiracy of anglers, started

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

by Halford and carried on with increasing momentum by later writers, to make out that the art is so dreadfully obscure that none but the gifted should attempt it. The perplexed beginner, poring over the great masters, reads of the accuracy and delicacy required in casting; how the fly must fall exactly right at the first throw, how a single mistake is fatal, how he must be able to recognize at a glance each of the hundred and one insects on which trout feed, how, unless his fly is an exact copy, he had better stay at home, and, in short, how he will never catch anything unless he acquires an abstruse and esoteric science of which certain austere practitioners are the sole depositaries. He despairs of reaching this level, and perhaps, losing confidence, avoids Hampshire. He is completely misled. He believes what is really egregious nonsense. The sport has its difficulties, and they are not small; but in the first place anyone with ordinary ability can surmount them, and in the second the price paid for failure is not nearly so great as writers would have us believe. You can make heaps of mistakes and yet kill plenty of fish on a difficult river and a difficult day. Take the day I have just described. No doubt it sounds excruciatingly hard when you read about it. You must cast delicately, and put your fly four inches this side or four inches that without a bungle, you must have on the right fly and it must float upright and without drag. But believe me, it is not nearly so hard as it sounds. Try it. Just as with modern guns anyone can make himself a passable shot, so with modern rods and lines anyone can cast. True, you must be suited with a rod

A JUNE DAY

which will "finish the cast"—that is, which will not only throw the line, which all respectable rods can do, but also the gut, throwing it in a dead straight line right up to the fly: but this is largely a matter of rod, and you can find the right one after a little searching. And, given that, anyone can cast, and, when you can cast, placing the fly is soon acquired. Remember how often during the day you are either casting or drying your fly, and by continually doing this you soon learn at what distance a given length of line will place it and what allowance to make for wind. When you have done that, you can put your fly on the water where you want it, and you will kill fish. You learn to cast lightly because you see at once the dreadful things that happen if you do not. True, there remain always before you the three great mountain peaks of casting, which most of us spend all our lives trying to climb, sometimes advancing, sometimes, alas, slipping back. The first of these peaks is the capacity to put your fly always straight into a strong wind: straight into it and not across it: and a real heavy wind: not a fresh breeze, or any nonsense of that sort, but what our Caroline ancestors called a whistling wind; the second, the ability to throw a very slack line and yet drop your fly time after time on the same spot; and the third, the skill to cock your fly, at any rate more often than not. These are stern and lofty peaks, and none but the gifted can surmount them. Most of us spend our lives struggling to get a little way up. But though only a few can reach the top, at any rate all can climb the foothills. And when you have done this, you

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

will catch fish, and catch them on the Kennet, the Itchen or the Test.

Do not let it be supposed, however, that because the dry fly is not as difficult as it is made out to be therefore the great exponents of it are not skilled fishermen. Of course they are. There are many who are supremely good. Some of them are such as excel at many kinds of fishing: others who are trained on the chalk stream only. To reach high distinction, natural gift is required as well as long practice, patient study of the habits of trout, understanding of the implications of weather and water conditions, and a knowledge of insect life. And above these skilled practitioners come the great masters, who are as much superior to them as Mademoiselle Lenglen is superior to her compeers. They are a class apart, and they do not come frequently: but at least one is living to-day.

Neither let it be supposed that all days are like the one just described. On that one things went well, or at any rate there were no tragic happenings. But fishing is a sport in which we may have not only a bad day but a bad series of days and even a bad season. The truth is that in a pursuit so infinitely varied the possibilities of disaster are innumerable, and these may occur one after another, until you see no reason why you should ever catch another fish as long as you live. If we could look into the diaries, even of the great ones, we should find many blank days. An honest diary is instructive reading. When we write or talk in public, and even when we think, we dwell naturally on our successess, and the uninitiated get to imagine that

A JUNE DAY

these are the whole story. But a diary tells a different tale, at any rate mine does. Very different indeed. The day which I have described came after a succession of heart-breaking failures. The very day before I had had one of those shattering experiences which almost persuade you to be a golfer. It was on the fine Middleton water, below Longparish. All was in my favour: I had a nice stretch to myself, wind was not troublesome, big fish rose, and olives hatched from eleven to six. From eleven to six, for seven hours; I can hardly bear to write about it, for I came home fishless. I could rise the fish. Sometimes I could hook them. But land them I could not. Fish after fish, large and fat, broad-shouldered and spotted, were either missed at the strike or escaped after one or two rushes: trout were lost in every way in which they can be lost: they weeded, they broke, they got round snags, or they just let go: and in the end there came over me the hopeless finality of a nightmare in which the air is heavy with black disaster which you know will never lighten.

CHAPTER VII

HIGH SUMMER

My greatest pleasure, brothers, is fishing. Give me no bread to eat, but let me sit with a fish-hook.

Dreams. By ANTON TCHEHOV.

COMPARED WITH SPRING OR AUTUMN, JULY IN Hampshire is a dull season. Birds have reared their young and stopped singing, and therefore you neither hear their voices nor find their nests, thus losing two of the great enjoyments of spring. Flowers are fewer and less interesting, and in particular there are no flowering trees. The leaves of the trees, too, have lost their freshness and variety and are merged in a somewhat heavy monotony. The air, also, seems to lack some of its former sparkle and life and to have become worn and insipid. The newness and delight of fresh growth of spring are gone, and the delicate colouring and clarity of the autumn days are yet to come. To deny summer's beauties is of course absurd, for they are many and obvious, but perhaps in a southern county they are apparent rather in glowing gardens and glistening wheatfields than in the wild country proper, where, if the summer be at all dry, the light soil becomes somewhat of a harsh step-mother. Beauty is there, but it is to be sought

HIGH SUMMER

rather in the cultivated and the enclosed than in the open and the wild. But above even gardens and cornfields there is one spot where summer's splendours are concentrated, and that is in the river valleys. These always remain green and cool through the hottest of the year, decked with flowers and haunted by birds.

Until the dry fly came there was little fly fishing during the summer months, except on windy or wet days or at dusk. Even Stewart, enthusiast for the fly though he was, said that from the middle of June to the beginning of August was the worst part of the season for it, and that on the Tweed it was useless during the daytime. Hawker calls June a bad month for it. This is one of the most agreeable changes introduced by the floating fly, for now the fisherman's year is lengthened and July is not the worst of his months. All of us, if we had the choice, would probably take a day in the first half of June, and possibly most would prefer a day in May to one in July. But I am not sure that I would. The surroundings of course are more agreeable in May, but you often get better fishing in July, certainly on a late river. Fish are heavier and fatter. The bigger fish are more inclined to move, and they are more difficult to catch. And, on rivers such as the Kennet, the very large ones have not reached their full condition until June is nearly over.

Daytime fishing in summer is not dependent on the daily hatch. You often do best when but little fly is coming down; in fact on very hot days fly may not really appear till sunset. The evening

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

fishing is then good; but this chapter is concerned with daytime fishing only, and that, too, can often be quite successful, if you set about it the right way. You must look upon it as the very converse of that of early May; then you did little except when olives were sailing down, whilst now you will have many days in which you do not depend on duns at all. You pick up trout in unexpected places and in unexpected ways, and at the end of the day you will be surprised at recalling how many chances you had and at what a variety of flies fish have risen.

As the weather gets hotter fish shift their quarters. They move first of all into the quick broken water. In a hot spell, this holds a great attraction for fish, I suppose because it is fully aerated and supplied with the oxygen on which they live. Watch all of this carefully, especially the very fast, rough shallows. I need not warn you that trout on such thin water are most particularly shy. However slow-running your stretch, it will have some fast shallows, and you must search every inch of these. But, what is not generally known, chalk stream trout leave the shallows in a very hot season. They migrate into deep water: into quick-running deeps if they can find them, but at any rate into deeps. This they do for coolness, and they get into queer places, especially the big ones. The edges of the islands of dead weed which always form on chalk streams must be explored: and, particularly if a broad expanse of these is held up above a bridge, and a film of scum forms round its upstream side, as it usually does, always expect to see a big nose poked up through the scum. Flies

HIGH SUMMER

get carried down and collected there, and wise old trout regard such places as ever-stocked larders. Then backwaters or eddies are often productive, where such eddies are found, but they are difficult. The most experienced trout inhabit them, and they are hard to fish because of drag. Of course they are easier if they are so big that you can fish them the natural way of their current and your reel line does not fall in the main stream. But even so their trout are certainly more shy than usual. You ought to get a long way off them, which, as most backwaters are short, you cannot do without drag. All these difficulties, however, are as nothing to those of fishing a small eddy, particularly those short, rippling eddies beloved of big trout and found especially beside racing streams. Indeed, the faster the current the more eddies you have in a winding river. You have to fish across to them, and, however slack your reel line, it is often impossible to get your fly to float at all, and usually it will not travel more than four inches; which, as eddy trout are exasperatingly slow and know very well that it is the drag which protects them, is just enough to cause them to look at it with detachment and wait for it to drag. However, you can sometimes, if you study an eddy carefully, get well inshore of it, and drop your fly just over the bank with slack gut behind it: but it is a case of first cast or never, for you generally get hung up. Or, from the other bank, you may by a little ingenuity discover that you can anchor your reel line on to a weed bed, whereby you can avoid that maddening incident of seeing your fly whisked away just as a

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

good fish was about to swallow it. The worst eddies of all are on the Derbyshire Wye. They are short, and edged by a tearing stream: and in summer every fish is in them.

Carriers are often worth exploring, more perhaps for excitement than for profit. On them you hardly ever find a hatch of duns, so you must tempt their inmates with something different. Nothing beats a caperer. The lower Test has not many carriers, for the water-meadow system has fallen into abeyance, but they are still in full swing on the Kennet. On 21st June 1915 I was fishing there: it was hot weather, hay had not been cut, and carriers ran full. About two o'clock in the afternoon I found myself by a narrow but very deep and rapid one, bordered with reeds and paved with orange gravel. I could see neither fish nor rises: but, casting the welshman's button on chance, trout after trout sailed up from the depths, inspected the fly and took it. I caught four, great and gallant fighters. But though I went to that carrier before and often since, I have never done so well again. Carrier fishing, indeed, cannot even be called uncertain, so few are the successes.

If there are mills on the river, the pools which take the surplus water will be deep and swirly at the top under the hatches, but shallow at the tail. Here they frequently spread out into many narrow runways, in which trout lie, not rising but riseable. You must be very slow moving, keep a long way off, and cast seldom. A tup or hackle olive often do well.

Lastly come the smooth glassy glides above where

HIGH SUMMER

streams break, particular favourites of summer fish. All of these, fast shallows, deep water, weed islands, eddies, mill tails and smooth glides, may hold taking fish, and give you a long summer day's work. And, besides, you will get other opportunities, when you may catch fish in any part of the water—a hatch of duns, a fall of spinners, or the presence of smuts or ants or daytime sedges, or any of the hot weather insects, or nymphs—of which more later.

In the upper waters, or in any reaches where trout are visible, you need not wait to see rises. You may find such, but you must not depend upon doing so. In this point also summer fishing is the opposite of spring: in spring you look for rises, in summer for fish. Look for fish on the top of the water, either stationary or cruising, who are clearly on the watch. You will recognize them easily: in streamy water they lie near the surface, with fins a-quiver, an air of expectancy running over them: in the slower parts they may be cruising, looking upwards. In either case they may be rising. The stream fish may take an olive as it whisks over his head; the still water one may sip something invisible off the surface; but do not wait for this, for either of them will take a floating fly if you choose the right pattern and present it artfully. Now both these types are too well known to need description. You must go beyond them, if you want a bag: you must learn to spot fish which are not so obvious: and this is more difficult than it appears and requires more explanation.

In the sunny shallows of the upper Test trout are

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

clearly visible. You find that all day long you are casting to fish which you can see. But in the lower Test it is different, for there the water is deeper, heavier, and tinged with colour, and you are usually fishing for trout which you do not see. And yet you must see them, to succeed in summer angling. You must cultivate an eye for water and an eye for trout. The gift is not easily attained: in all cases it requires practice: and some never acquire it. But it can be learnt by nine people out of ten. It is learnt by what seems easy but is hard: looking at the water. Looking at it not lightly or casually, but examining it intently, boring into it, determining to penetrate its hidden recesses.

Have you ever lain on the heather in Scotland alongside a stalker, both of you sweeping your telescopes over the hillside opposite? If you have, you will know that when he shuts his glass he has not only seen more stags than you have, but knows more about those he has seen. You put it down to his better sight or superior telescope, but you are wrong, for both your sight and your glass are as good as his. He beats you first of all because he knows where to look, and what to look for. He knows, for instance, that on a hot day such as it is, the big beasts will be high up and away from the flies. He knows, too, that that small, dark object which you thought was a dead stick is a stag's horn, and that the duller patch on the reddening grass, which you passed by unnoticed, is the haunch of an animal lying down, the rest of him hidden. These two powers, that of knowing where to look and what to look for, he has gained, no doubt, from

HIGH SUMMER

long experience: but he has one faculty which you can possess just as well as he: a concentration, an intentness, an almost savage determination to miss nothing and to tear its secrets from the distant hill. And this is the beginning of his success. You must follow in his steps. You must make up your mind that if there are trout in the river you will see them. It is often wonderfully hard to do so, for the lower Test is deep and swirly and usually ruffled by breezes. Trout are dim, uncertain and nearly invisible. You learn after a time where to look and what to look for. You must not expect to see a whole trout, outlined solidly as though lying on a fishmonger's slab: any fool can see that: but what you have to train yourself to pick out is a flicker, a movement, a darkness, a luminosity which if you stare at it hard enough will resolve itself into a shadowy form. It may be weed, or a reflection, or a shaft of light through the wavering water: but on the other hand it may be a trout: whenever, therefore, you pitch upon anything unexpected or surprising which by remote chance may be a fish, never leave it until you have solved its riddle. You will waste time on stones or gravel or sticks or such-like, but it is remarkable how you improve, and nothing improves you so quickly as being with someone who is good at the game. There used to be a keeper on the St. Cross water on the Itchen who was a marvel. Neither bad light nor wind nor cloudy water made any difference: not only could he see fish invisible to my eyes, but he could see them sufficiently clearly to make out whether they were likely to take; and

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

I owe to his capacity many a trout for which otherwise I should not even have fished. He taught me much; and for summer fishing you must have this power, if you are to be properly equipped. It is often amusing, if humiliating, to see how sturdy and obvious a trout is after you have made him out, whereas a second earlier you could have sworn that there was nothing there. Only recently I was fishing at Mottisfont: the morning was running on, and I was doubting whether I should get a fish. I had over and over again run my eye up and down a stretch of fast, broken water: nothing could I see but active and obtrusive youngsters, disgustingly conspicuous: and I was just going to give it up, when suddenly I fancied there was a movement quite close to me. I looked again, and saw nothing, and thought it must have been a dancing ripple; I looked a third time, and behold there was a trout; a trout fat and conspicuous; and I had not seen him sooner because the tumbling water threw a flickering shadow over him and broke him up into what looked like pebbles, just as our battleships were camouflaged in war. He took a dark hackle olive, and weighed only just under two pounds.

Of course, in this summer fishing, when the water is crystal clear, the sky cloudless, the sun hot and trout watchful, you must use fine gut. You will find you do best with 4x. It is terrible stuff to use: it is incomparably more dangerous than 3x: you have a lead-like feeling in your stomach when you are playing a big fish: and you may expect breakages. But you must use it, if the rules of the water you are fishing allow you to do so. I know

HIGH SUMMER

not why, but just that change from 3x to 4x makes all the difference. Buy the best points you can get: always carry two ready soaked, and as you use one put another in your damper. Give each strand a good sharp tug (a steady pull is no test) after you have knotted it on: examine it constantly and change it often: it rots quickly and unaccountably, especially in sunny weather: when you are lunching or resting, never lose an opportunity of soaking your cast. There are two indications which warn the wise man that his point is going. When you break off your fly in order to change it, pay attention to the force required: you soon get to know how much is wanted to snap it: and if it comes away too easily, look to your whole point. Similarly, when you get caught in a tree or grass stem, you know exactly what pull you dare give in order to free your fly: if you break, be on your guard. If you are very careful, you will get through without many smashes, and, on the other hand, really good fresh 4x will stand a heavy strain. And oh, the joy in the evening, when the sun has set, and the hot wind has dropped, and a grateful coolness rises from the earth, and moths like moving shadows are feeding at the river grasses, and nightjars are churring in the wood, and the meadow darkens under the opal twilight—oh, the joy and the confidence of looping on a stronger cast. Even with 3x you believe you could hold a salmon, whilst when you hook that three pounder on a sedge and know that your point is 1x, why, you feel that the odds are not fair. It is almost worth suffering during the day in order to experience the relief. You must persevere

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

with 4x. After a time you gain delicacy of touch and do not break so often. Weeds are, and always remain, your great trouble, and you will lose most big fish which weed deeply. Have at least three feet of 4x on your cast. You need not get beyond 4x, for 5x is nearly impossible for heavy fish.

In really hot weather, trout in club water become amazingly gut-cunning. I remember once coming on a fish at Driffeld, lying on the opposite side of a still pool. I put the fly well to my side of him, showing him no gut: he turned out to take it, but before doing so, he swam round it to see if there was gut on the other side. He saw it and sheered off. I can never get anyone to believe this simple and truthful tale. The dry year, 1929, made the trout at Stockbridge marvellous keen-sighted. I have never known them so tiresome. I need not tell you to cast lightly, for you know that already. Let the fly fall by its own weight. But also study how to get it to the trout without his seeing any gut. When you are fishing across, this is obvious and easy: but when you have to cast up as well as across, it pays you to throw the curve. This is described later. It is hard. You will not succeed every time. You will do it better on some days than others, for no discernible reason. You lose accuracy, for it is more difficult to place the fly. But you catch more trout. I am only just beginning to acquire it. It is almost impossible to throw the curve to a fish rising straight above you.

For the curve, you must fish with a slanting rod: and this you should do always when you are at all close to your fish. Trout are quick to see the

HIGH SUMMER

moving rod if raised high; and you know very well what happens if they do.

As to flies, I am quite certain that it pays to carry a large variety. When I started the dry fly, the common opinion was that for summer fishing you need not go beyond the red quill and the wickham, with the possible addition of the detached badger. And that is still partly true of Driffeld Beck, that difficult water, where nothing beats the smallest red quill. But on the Kennet it is useless, and on the Test I do little with it. Test trout have seen too many red quills. And quite apart from the merits of the red quill, you need a great many more patterns than two. I know no one nowadays who so limits and handicaps himself, and for myself I use a very large number. I have looked up in my diary three hot summer days, one each from the last three years. Trout rose at, or were landed on, eighteen different flies (I caught fourteen); eighteen, without counting large sedges used at dusk. Here are the patterns: three different nymphs, orange partridge, small red partridge, hackle blue-wing, two different sedges, smut, black ant, yellow boy, sherry spinner, houghton ruby, ginger quill, caperer, hackle hare's ear, Lunn's particular and orange quill. I am certain that I should not have done so well had I used two or three patterns only. I am quite certain of it. July provides varied feeding, and on some days every fish is eating something different. Of the fourteen fish, eleven were killed on floating flies and three on sunk.

July fishing therefore requires all the angler's

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

skill to a superlative degree. It is the height of the trout's cunning, for in June he has not grown to his full craft, whilst by August he begins to grow a little careless. But in July he makes the most exacting call upon your art. Light and close casting, showing no gut, concealment and long distance attack—all these are required. But above all you must divine almost by intuition what fly he wants. Sometimes it is the article he is devouring, often it is not. In such cases you must call memory to your aid, and your fish sense. But the greatest help will be to have at your side one who knows what fish are thinking about. Such beings are rare, but they exist. Their gift is partly acquired, but a large portion of it is innate.

Well, perhaps this seems a fantastication. But really it is not so. Fishing a difficult river at a difficult season on a difficult day, I always know that there is one artificial which any given trout will take. I reach it, if I do so at all, by laborious trials; others seem to get there by a leap, an inspiration, which is only granted to the great fishers.

Next to June, I like July best. You catch more in May, of course, and the valley is lovelier: but July makes the highest demands on you, and its rewards, being rare, are the more exquisite.

You often get fish on odd patterns, on non-descript hackles or the fly called the little chap (really a beetle) or the pheasant tail. One hot July afternoon on the Bourne I got three fish on it in rapid succession, after olive and red quill had been refused. It is a favourite of mine. And this

HIGH SUMMER

brings me to another point. In summer, in club water, it often pays to try a new dressing or a new invention or some old concoction which has been laid aside long ago. Club members, exchanging notes upon killing patterns, inevitably tend to use the same, and trout get familiar with them, but will often take something new, just because it is different. But do not forget that they will soon get suspicious of this also, and then you had better go back again to the old tried copies, which are intrinsically superior.

After ants have got on the water, which may be as early as July, never forget to try the black or red pattern. Be on the watch for small sedges also: a small dark pattern has yielded me many a gallant trout. But often you are in despair. Fly after fly is refused. Fish are taking something, sipping it off the surface, but nothing you do induces them to take you. Your patterns get smaller and smaller till they are hardly discernible. A fish looks long and steadily at your pheasant tail and turns away. You reel in, take your scissors, and clip the hackle short until there is little left except the body (often a very profitable dodge) but still he gives it nothing more than a cold, concentrated stare. What are you to do? You cannot use smaller flies. Why, try a caperer—the invaluable caperer—greatest of summer flies. Many and many are the fish it has yielded to me; yielded to me in burning, still weather, under a cloudless sky, in transparent water. On 24th July 1921 I was fishing one of the most difficult beats in the south of England. In 1921 it really was hot, July was the hottest month,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and no one was getting anything except at night. About mid-day I found myself fishless at the bottom of a long, slow-running stretch, notoriously hard at the best of times. A good fish was lying near the surface: he looked at, but refused, a tup. I tried several other flies, and to each, when he saw them for the first time, he gave a critical and dispassionate inspection, but after that he took no more notice than he would of a pound note. The light breeze had been killed by the sun, the air was glowing, and the surface of the water like burnished steel. Almost in despair, I tried on a caperer. It fell with a flop, and looked like a dead cockchafer, but the trout had it at once. I, however, with a consistency which never deserts me, struck too soon, and did the same to the next two fish: but after that I learnt a little sense and killed three running, besides returning several. Every one took the caperer, and every one took it first cast. I did not see one of the natural flies on the water, and in fact all the trout which were moving were eating something minute. That was three fish, and at night I got two more, one of them again on the caperer. Then the blue-winged olive appeared and the caperer's reign was over. But I ended up with five fish, a good bag on such a day.

And now for a different side altogether of summer fishing. Hitherto we have been talking of fish which are eating nothing in particular; but in addition to these you will get other classes of genuine feeding fish: those taking nymphs or duns or spinners or smuts or ants or daytime sedges. You may get a morning hatch of duns in July; but,

HIGH SUMMER

in the settled hot weather of which I am talking, the day hatch tends to get weak, and what hatch there is tends to get put off till later. In a subsequent chapter I have given my reasons for believing that hot weather postpones the birth of fly until, if it be very hot, nothing appears till sunset. But it may appear earlier, and in particular it may come up between three and five in the afternoon. At Mottisfont on 15th June 1924, during a hot spell, there was a good show of iron blues between four and five o'clock, whilst very few could be seen in the morning. On the Kennet, when I stole a few days from other duties during the war, and fished for eight days between 11th and 22nd June 1915, then again in settled summer weather, there were sparse morning hatches, but the pale watery appeared strongly in the afternoon, sometimes as late as five o'clock. I could give other instances: that it does not happen oftener and is not more noticed is because English summer weather rarely is settled. Anyhow, whenever duns appear you ought to catch fish, and there is nothing particular to say about July fishing. But let me beg of you to try hackled patterns if winged ones are unsuccessful: hackle olives, dark or light, blue uprights, hackle iron blues, or tups are often invaluable, and in fact I have largely disregarded winged flies for summer fishing. And also never omit to try a pattern quite different from what the trout are obviously eating. A spinner, a small sedge, a nymph or an ant will often take a fish who is clearly feeding on pale wateries, when regulation copies have failed. Nymphs are dealt with in another chapter. When

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

trout are taking spinners, watch the water carefully to see what kind is coming down. If one artificial is refused, try another, and again another.

When Halford published *Dry-Fly Fishing* in 1889, he said that no angler must expect, unless under very exceptional circumstances, to make a bag with any dressing of the smut or fisherman's curse. Accordingly he advised us to discard these altogether, and to tempt smutting fish with a wickham, or with what he considered still better, a pink wickham; or we might try a silver sedge or a macaw tag. Even as late as 1910, when he published *Modern Development of the Dry Fly*, he rejected smuts on the ground that the 000 hooks on which they had to be tied were too small for big fish. But he does give patterns of the black gnat which he says smutting fish will take. We have travelled a long road from 1889. I have not seen a pink wickham for thirty years, and not many anglers use even the common one: but I was brought up to believe that it was the only method of catching smutters. Nor do we now regard 000 hooks as anything remarkable. Accordingly, when we see a fish smutting, we do not at once pull out our box and pick out our smallest wickham, we do otherwise, as I shall show.

Now, if you include black gnats, there are three species of smuts or curses in which the fisherman is interested. There is the black gnat itself, imitated admirably by Charles Cotton two and a half centuries ago, and included in almost all lists of flies. It is a small, dark, two-winged fly, with transparent wings and, in the male, particularly short ones.

HIGH SUMMER

The species which inhabits the Test is called *bibio johannis*, and appears, as its name implies, at mid-summer, on St. John's Day. It has a larger cousin, the hawthorn fly, *bibio marci*, which comes out at the end of April and is at its height during the second and third week in May. It is not, I think, common on the Test: but it is the common black gnat of Devonshire, where the trout take it greedily and refuse everything else, and the black gnat season is the best for heavy baskets. I have done well with it on the Otter.

The second of the curses or smuts is the reed smut, favourite of Marryat. I do not think I know the natural fly, nor can I find any description of its colour. It is imitated by a short, fat, dark body, with either palest starling or a white hackle for wings.

The third is the common fisherman's curse, well known and plentiful. It is an unpleasant looking, small, squat lump, grey-black in colour, and hairy: fish take it voraciously.

Now, quite unscientifically, I have classed all these three together. Fish usually take all of them in hot, still, sultry weather, chiefly towards evening, but often throughout the day, and sometimes in cold weather. Always, at all seasons, watch the water for smuts. Often smuts are so thick on the water that rises are almost continuous, and fish make very small disturbances. When well on the feed they are not easily put down.

The way to attack smutting fish was first described by Scotcher, in that rare book the *Fly Fisher's Legacy*, published about 1800. He says

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

that they take black gnats in still water on hot evenings, that you must have a light cast and a small fly, and must place it on the water in the direction in which the fish is cruising, so that it floats. That admirable account is perhaps chiefly of historical interest: but there is an excellent modern description in Mr. Mottram's *Fly Fishing*, published a few years ago. He is an enthusiast for the practice, and should be read. There is no better description. He says that a few circumstances favour the fisher, for the air is usually calm, you can place accurately, trout rise regularly and are not shy. On the other hand it is hard to tell big fish from small, and of course your tackle is delicate. But after all, I do not find smutters more intractable than other fish, and many are the good trout I have caught.

Patterns are innumerable. I carry three. First a black gnat, with a short, narrow, brownish body, the top half of the hook being bare, a sparse black hackle at the shoulder, and palest starling wings. Next, a badger smut with a thin quill body, wingless, and hackled at the head. And lastly, a black upright, dressed with a black hackle. If fish will not take these they will take nothing. If they look at them and turn away, trim down the hackle with your scissors.

Such is summer angling. Do not expect heavy bags. You will do more roaming and more watching than casting. But there is nothing like it for teaching you the river. After a bit you get to know every stone of it, and you discover crafty trout in unexpected places. And the joy of defeating them is great.



CHAPTER VIII

JULY ON THE LOWER TEST

Sometime we'll angle at the brook,
The freckled Trout to take.

The Quest of Cynthia.
By MICHAEL DRAYTON. 1627.

DURING DAYS WHICH ARE HOT, WITH A GUSTY WIND from the south, an early hatch of fly is unlikely: so the best chance of a fish on this particular morning was in the fastest water of the Oakley Stream. I decided to go there first, and then over to the main river at two o'clock, when, if they appeared at all before sundown, pale wateries and iron blues were to be expected. Getting my rod and strolling up, I saw that trout were on the top of the water, no big ones as yet, but, still, a hopeful sign. I soaked my cast. The sun was bright, and the water clear. On chance I knotted on a dark hackle olive.

In spite of the tumbled surface of the river, the shadow of the trees on the opposite bank rendered every trout visible. With long pauses, watching the water, I made my way slowly up. Farmers were busy carrying hay, and horses were standing in the shade, packed in a lump to avoid the flies. Birds had stopped singing, and the banks were brilliant with mimulus and loosestrife. An occasional fish rose, but on investigation proved to be undersized.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

I found one on the look-out which I thought might reach a pound and half, but at the third throw I got hung up—and on closer inspection I decided that he was not worth the labour of a crawl on my stomach, or the risk of losing cast or fly. It was an oppressive day, and he was not up to weight.

More than an hour had passed, and the best of the quick water drawn blank, before the first good fish rose. He was lying just above a low fall, a foot from my bank, taking something invisible, now moving three or four yards upstream and then dropping back. With the wind behind me, it was an easy shot, the only problems being to overcome the drag caused by the reel line being caught in the quick tumble of the fall, and to make sure where he actually was before casting: for, when I got into position for attacking him, the glitter on the water made him invisible. But there was plenty of time, rising fish would be hard to find, and I could proceed leisurely. After half a dozen throws he took me, and bolted down the fall: but that was the limit of his effort, and he was soon in the net. He was not as fat as he should have been, but he weighed 1 lb. 9 oz.

After that I landed three more which did not quite come up to the limit, ate my sandwiches, and took the pleasant path through scented hayfields to the main river. It was running full: the wind had dropped, and the clouds disappeared. I sat down on a convenient seat, and smoked a cigarette: the river had that set and placid look which makes you think a rise impossible. It seemed sunk in a repose which nothing could break, and I was in two minds

JULY ON THE LOWER TEST

whether to stay out or go home, such a deadness had fallen on the world. But on second thoughts it was better to wait, at any rate till three o'clock, and in order to pass the time I walked up. I had not gone far before olives showed on the surface, and there was an undoubted movement on the far side of a big weed patch. It occurred again, but seemed more like a bulge than a rise. However, it was easy to mark, I crawled to the bank, and floated my hackle olive over the spot. After six throws without any result, a trout broke the water three or four yards higher up, undoubtedly bulging, and so certain did it seem that it was the same fish that I was about to show him a fly on chance, when unexpectedly the original fish gave an unmistakable rise in his original spot. He took the hackle olive at once; an unenterprising and unimaginative creature, who had no ideas except weed and made no determined effort to reach that. He weighed 2 lb. 1 oz.

It was seven o'clock before I got back, this time to the bottom of the main river. The evening was warm and still, and blue-winged olives were to be expected. Nothing happened till nearly half-past eight, and then pale watery began to trickle down, followed by tall blue-winged olives, and a fish or two rose tentatively. As I worked my way up, I saw, round a corner through the long grasses, ~~such~~ a commotion as must assuredly be a rat or waterhen: but, no, it was not, it was a fish: a fish rising not meticulously and wearily as others were rising, but boldly and generously, taking blue-winged olives right and left in gallant style, keeping the surface in a continual boil. With such a fish, the hatch just

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

starting and dusk coming on, a take is almost a certainty, unless you are unusually inept. I had on a variant, which he swallowed as soon as he saw it. He weighed 1 lb. 12 oz. After that, as blue-winged olives were getting thicker, I nipped off my 4x point and tied a No. 0 orange quill on to a 3x cast. I got two half-hearted rises, neither of which was hooked, and then, as there was little doing and twilight was deepening and sedge time approaching, walked up half a mile to where I had been told of a veritable three-pounder. About a hundred yards below the spot, round a corner of tussocky grass, I thought I saw the outside of a ring, quite close to me. It was hard to be certain, for it was getting dark and the stream made a ripple round that point, but I felt convinced I had seen more than that ripple. I stepped quietly back a couple of paces—I was too near—and threw my orange quill over the grasses, as far as I could judge two feet above the rise. I could not see my fly, nor more than the edge of the rise, should a fish take me: at the first cast nothing happened, and on recovering the line from the second the fly got immovably fixed in the bank, just above where the fish ought to be. Lying flat on my stomach I could keep my head below the grasses, and I pulled myself forward and felt for the fly. Just at that moment I saw the trout rise, not four feet from my nose, through the grass stems. I pushed myself back with the fly in my hand, got my rod, and cast again. A wave appeared over the tussock, I struck, the line jarred through the grasses, caught, jerked clear, and the fish was in midstream, firmly hooked. It was impossible to see his size,

JULY ON THE LOWER TEST

and he did not pull heavily, but one never knows. He rolled about, low in the water, and I ran below him to get a downstream pull. I pulled and he pulled, he was deep on the bottom and obviously making for weed: into it he got, but not far, and without losing a second I put down the rod and hand-lined him. At first there was the dead feeling of a weeded line, then a wobble and a kick, then he was clear and a good firm tug with the hand brought him three or four yards down, and I grabbed the rod and ran down the level meadow. All looked well, the bank was open, water deep, and not greatly encumbered with weed, and when you do succeed in extracting a weeded fish you usually get him. And so it happened. He had to be taken a long way, and in the dusk was troublesome to bring to the net. He weighed 2 lb. 13 oz. The four fish amounted to 8 lb. 3 oz.: an excellent day.

July fishing is in some ways the most exciting of all, for no angling can be so disappointing and yet none yields greater prizes. You may have a succession of days on which all goes wrong: when it is hot, and you are slogging against one of those heavy summer winds which, when you have to throw into them, feel not so much like a wind as a solid movement of air. And you may watch all day and not see a decent fish rise: or you may find one or two, and make a mess of them all in succession. On the other hand there may come times in which you do marvellous well, and the thought that these are before you keeps hope alight in your heart.

I remember once going for a week-end to the

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

Kennet. It was hot July weather, I fished badly, others got trout and I did not, and on Monday morning I felt that deep-rooted contempt for myself and my capacity to which fishermen are surely more subject than other mortals. My host suggested that I should stay on. I refused at first, so disgusted was I, besides knowing very well that my duty lay in London: but I yielded, we went up and found a hatch of light olives on the very pick of the water. I do not remember trying for more than two fish during the whole morning, and at least an hour was spent over one. But both were caught; one weighed 2 lb. 5 oz. and the other 3 lb. 12 oz. Thus is the transgressor rewarded.

On some rivers where mayfly comes, but not on all, you get a period of deadness after it is over. Fishermen put it down to overeating and call it the mayfly glut. It has always seemed to me very questionable whether it is due to mayfly. First of all, though you find the phenomenon on the Test, you do not find it on other waters. And secondly, as the trout is a hearty eater with an admirable digestion, he would recover from the greediest gorge imaginable in a couple of days, whilst the dead time lasts for two or three weeks. During these weeks trout must eat regularly twice a day, or they would get quite hungry. They are not like boa constrictors. It is difficult to think that they eat too little because a week ago they ate too much. Yet the fact remains that they are difficult to bring up to a tup or ginger quill. For this reason June is often a bad month after the mayfly is over. And, as compensation, July is often superior. If mayfly

JULY ON THE LOWER TEST

is not to blame, why is it that June fishing is often so bad? Fishermen are agreed that, when mayfly has been on a water and leaves it, small fly increases immensely. Mayfly died out at Kimbridge on the Test in about 1910: the result, I am told, was greater quantity of small fly and better fishing on that famous water. The same thing happened at Ramsbury on the Kennet, and there the change was so immense, and the hatches of duns were so immeasurably greater, that the whole character of the water was altered. In 1924, when mayfly abounded at Mottisfont and Kimbridge, June fishing was bad. The complaint of absence of fly was, indeed, universal throughout the Test. However, though it is only guess work from personal observation, I am not sure that the amount of blue-winged olive, on which July fishing depends, did vary greatly: there was just as much when mayfly was present as when it was absent. So perhaps bad fishing in June is caused more by the absence of fly than by mayfly glut.

July is the month for the evening rise. No fishing is so disappointing. The best plan is to go out expecting little, and to be content if you come back with a brace. Lord Grey of Fallodon, whose book was published over thirty years ago, when bags were certainly no smaller than now, considered that a brace and a half in the evening was a good catch. Nowadays most of us are satisfied with a brace, certainly if they average two pounds. Of course you will have bigger scores, and it may be that you will come down one evening from London, not reaching the river till eight o'clock, and yet

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

wind up with three brace. We have all done it. And that colours our expectations, and makes us dissatisfied with one fish or two. We always demand the best as of right, just as we expect our shooting to reach always to the form of those exceptional days when we could miss nothing.

But, after all, though the evening may not realize our hopes, it is ever before us, throughout the long summer day. Spinners will fall on the water: the blue-winged olive, with its narrow wings, looking large in the twilight, will suddenly appear: we shall hear, loud in the silence, the splash of a big fellow walloping at the sedge. The heavy wind will die down with the sun, and the placing of the fly will be a matter of delicacy and delight, absent on a gusty morning. However irritating trout may be during day, the evening is always there to atone. And how pleasant is the river. House flies, curse of summer fishing, no longer buzz distractingly in your ear, or settle maddeningly on your nose. You no longer have to crawl or to crouch, hot and uncomfortable, behind tall grasses which your hook catches when it will catch nothing else, or to kneel on chunks of hard uncompromising chalk. You can stand on your two feet, and feel master of the situation: just as, when you hook a big salmon while wading deep in a rushing, boulder-strewn river, and you struggle to the bank, now stumbling painfully over slippery stones, now stopping to deal with the mad rushes of your mighty captive—when you do reach shore, and plant both feet firmly on solid earth, you feel inclined to shout to him: “Now, my friend, if you are in your element,

JULY ON THE LOWER TEST

at any rate I am in mine." That is what you experience in twilight fishing for trout, when you can approach them openly and fearlessly.

Often, however, the sunset rise does not atone, and a bad evening follows a bad morning. You must expect these in July, a month when the sport is more uncertain than ever. The day described at the beginning of this chapter was one when all went well. Often all goes wrong. Exactly a week later, I suffered disaster after disaster. One day, a good fishing day too, with a light north wind (what more can a Test fisherman ask for?), I spent all day at Kimbridge. Two rods got three fish in the morning, which was little, but we had high hopes that sunset would bring up some of those mighty fellows for which that water is famous. But no: it was a fair evening, calm and clear: I was on the river till ten at night, and not a rise did I see. And on the following day at Mottisfont, in fine summer weather, I had only one real chance in the morning, when a large trout which I had induced to take a black gnat bolted into weed and broke my fine gut. Again all my hopes were set on the evening: but again they were disappointed: the weather changed, heavy clouds covered the sky, and a gusty wind got up. I hardly saw a fish rise. But, with all its uncertainties and its bitter disappointments, I would rather have a day in July than one in May.

CHAPTER IX

AN AUGUST DAY

Go take thine angle, and with practised line,
Light as the gossamer, the current sweep;
And if thou failest in the calm still deep,
In the rough eddy may a prize be thine.
Sonnet. By THOMAS DOUBLEDAY. 1826.

IT WAS A CALM, CLEAR MORNING, IN THE SECOND period of the Angler's Year, that period which runs from the third week in May till the middle of August. The banks were glowing with the flowers of late summer, the liquid yellow of the mimulus mixed with the solid purple of the loosestrife, whilst here and there were to be discovered the first blooms of that rare and lovely inhabitant of chalk streams, the red and orange balsam. It fell to my lot to fish the beat known as Black Lake. I went to the bottom and strolled up. A little fly was coming down, a few medium olive, pale watery, smut, and spent iron blue. Looking at the last named, I knotted on a houghton ruby, the only really good imitation of the deep red of the female insect, a food of which the trout are mighty fond. I never do much, by the way, with the male, the beautiful jenny spinner, belauded by some writers. It is, in my observation, much less common on the

AN AUGUST DAY

water than the other, and much less attractive to trout.

Fish moved rarely. They were hard to find, hard to rise, and easy to put down. At three fish I failed with some discredit. One bolted off at the first throw: the second, lying under the opposite bank, to whom I cast what I flattered myself was an admirable and delicate fly, kneeling right back in the meadow, took just one look at my light hackle hare's ear, and promptly disappeared: whilst the third did indeed take me, but took gingerly and lackadaisically, and I missed him. Then at last I got one. He was lying in deep fast water, below a thick weed patch over which the stream rattled. It was an easy shot straight above me: and he took my houghton ruby first cast. To my disgust I failed to hook him, I am a very bad striker; but by undeserved fortune he was not disturbed, a rare event on so shy a day. I let him eat a natural or two, whilst I knotted on again my light hackle hare's ear: I put this a foot above him, it floated past him and I was about to lift, when I saw him follow down and take me. He weighed just over two pounds.

It was now eleven o'clock, and the day changed for the worse. It clouded over, a gusty wind blew from the west, and fly became scarcer than ever. I wandered up, being quite unsuccessful at the few risers which were to be found, until I reached the foot of a fast gravelly carrier, often holding heavy trout. Do not ever expect to see rises in a carrier; you must explore it, step by careful step, looking for fish. Most carrier trout will rise to a fly, if they

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

are anywhere near it. I found one, and a good one too. The first throw was short, my hackle caperer falling to his side, and he turned round and hunted it as it raced down the tearing stream. This is always a dangerous performance, bringing the heart into the mouth, for fish are very likely to come so far down that they see you and then all is over. I stood as still as a post, and fortunately, though he missed the fly, he did not see me, and, waiting till he had got back to his place, I put the caperer well above him this time, and hooked him solidly. He was very fat, nearly a quarter of a pound heavier than the first.

The afternoon was unproductive. I missed one fish on a large orange partridge, sunk, but that was all, and I looked forward to the evening.

My beat was Cooper's Meadow. The wind dropped with the sun, the sky cleared, the air was warm and limpid, and the conditions were as nearly perfect as can be expected in an imperfect world. About half-past eight, all of a sudden, sherry spinner began to float down, and three fish rose within easy reach. I missed two of them on a houghton ruby, but then killed the second on a sherry spinner. He refused it two or three times when floating, but then it sank and he had it at once. After landing him I looked round, and realized that I was in for a great fall of sherry spinner. The fly was in the air like a golden mist, it was thick on the water, and all up the straight stretch of the river, trout were rising regularly and steadily every few seconds. I may do anything, I said to myself: a clear evening, two hours of

AN AUGUST DAY

fishing before me, trout rising ecstatically: what wild success is not possible? Will it be that evening of dreams, when fish rise and cease not, and every fish that rises takes? It took some time to undeceive me, but if ever fisherman were completely undeceived, it was I. There was far too much fly. For five and forty minutes did I fish. I tried for at least ten trout. They were eating sherry spinner, not a doubt of it, I could see them doing so, but my sherry spinner they would not eat. It had to pass too severe a test, against that constant flow of the real insect. Nor would they eat any other artificial. No, they went on feeding, disregarding me and treating my art with contempt. Finally, distracted and despairing, after I had only succeeded in landing one grayling—a big one, truly, but what is a grayling when trout, three brace of them, ought to be caught?—I put on an orange quill No. 1, to fish the evening out. That did nothing in the fast stretch where I was: but, above the weir that bounded it, in a deep, tree-shaded length, I caught two more, just over four pounds the brace. Then ten o'clock came, dusk deepened to night, and, as though by signal, every trout stopped, and there descended on the water that deadness which fishermen know so well.

All was over. I walked home, having caught five trout and a grayling, musing on the mutability of the fisherman's fortune. In a difficult morning, I had landed two, in a marvellous evening only one more. But what a sport is ours, I thought. Success is followed by failure, and no sooner have you

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

been elated by some trumpety triumph than you are cast down and humiliated by one of those eternal problems which we are always trying to solve and always being defeated.

CHAPTER X

THE END OF THE SEASON

Just one cast more! How many a year
Beside how many a pool and stream
Beneath the falling leaves and sere,
I've sighed, reeled up, and dreamed my dream!
The Last Cast. By ANDREW LANG.

WHETHER YOU CAN FISH LATE IN THE SEASON OR not depends on the river. On early rivers such as the Test, fish are out of condition at a time when those of the Kennet or of Driffeld Beck or even of the Itchen are fat, hard and lusty. But these are late waters, and on all of them I have often fished up to the last week of the month, and found nearly every fish landed fit to keep. Even on the Test, moreover, most of those which you take you can quite well keep. So, if you behave prudently, that is no reason why you should deny yourself the joy of autumn fishing. I am not of those hedonists who want the cream or nothing. No. That is all very well for those who are free to fish when they please, and can take their fill in the blue and silver days of May or in green and golden June. Who would not fish right through those two months if he could, and satiate, were it possible, the insatiable craving? But we cannot all do so. We have to

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

distribute our days, so we wander down restlessly before the curtain rises and linger a little after it has fallen. And therefore autumn fishing has its place with us: and it has its charm too. River and water meadows and woods have characteristic qualities which they do not show at other times. Purple loosestrife and velvet reedmace, swallows sitting on telegraph wires and goldfinches busy among the tall down thistles, stubbles ribboned with fresh furrows and wine-dark dog-wood in the hedges—all these make a picture very different from that of May. And the trout are different too. It must be confessed that they are easier. But they do not get really easy until the poor brutes are slack and out of condition and then, of course, they should be left alone.

I have many recollections of September trout, and several of the Test valley. Of these two stand out. One day, long ago, I fished at Bransbury, over that Common which has its particular beauties in every season. It was the second week of the month, and I was on the water by half-past ten. It is so many years ago that I have forgotten details. But I know how many fish I got, and what they weighed and what fly they took. I know also that never in all my life have trout weeded so uproariously. I was broken four times, an extravagant allowance even for me.

The start was unpropitious; it was a cloudy, hot morning with a light drizzle, and I at once very cleverly broke in a fine, long fish, which weeded, but not deeply. And immediately after I broke again, this time when the fish was running in open

THE END OF THE SEASON

water. Now, you should never break in the run, unless your gut is rotten, or your reel too stiff, or you check the line somehow: never, I mean, in open water, however big the fish and however fine your gut. I tested my point and found it rotten, and not only it but all the sample. Was not that a maddening start, and all my own fault? A fish that breaks you must be well hooked or he would not break, and a well-hooked fish is usually landed, and both of those might have been mine. I might have had a brace which would have weighed well over three pounds, and in the first ten minutes too. Oh, fool that you are!

I put on a new cast with the same fly, a small ginger quill. Pale watery duns were coming down, and I had been told to use it if they appeared. And, with good fortune which was quite undeserved, I got a fish of 1 lb. 11 oz. almost at once. He rushed through a long bed of weeds and then walloped about distractingly; but I had gained a little sense, dropped my point, pulled off line and finally hand-lined him out.

By now the sun had come out and so had the duns. There was a nice, steady, even hatch from eleven to three. I got two more fish, 1 lb. 10 oz. and 1 lb. 8 oz. and then I lost two running, in weed. Fish vary greatly in the extent in which they take to weed, and on this day I well remember that every fish thought of nothing but ploughing light-heartedly into the nearest jungle. They were strong, heavy fish and they went deep and stayed there. Moreover there was an unusual quantity of floating dead weed, and great islands of it were

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

caught and anchored by growing weed. Dead weed is far more dangerous than living, for living is combed out all one way by the current: a fish when he weeds you is going upstream (or ought to be, for you ought to be below him) and you can extract him down the natural set of the vegetation. But dead stuff is like matted and tangled hair, sticking in all directions, and you must pull him across innumerable tough strands. Besides this, after a time the current drives it into a nearly solid mass. So firmly did these two trout jam me that in each case I had to break, and in each case lose nearly half my cast. At length, at about three o'clock, when every sign showed that the rise was ending, I hooked a somewhat unenterprising fish of 1 lb. 9 oz. who allowed himself to be kept out of weed.

The duns disappeared soon after three, and I went back for tea. I was out again by five. Between six and an hour when it was too dark to see, there was a large hatch of what I now suspect to have been blue-winged olives. It was before the day of the orange quill, nor did I then use Halford's coot-winged imitation—an imitation, by the way, which is often taken very well. I have done great things with it at Driffield, where the orange quill is useless. On the other hand it is no good on Kennet or Test, where the orange quill is excellent. But at that distant time I knew of neither, but flogged away instead with patterns which were then orthodox, with red and ginger quills, intermixed with various brands of olives, and probably detached badgers and small silver sedges. It was a noble rise, but not a trout looked at me until it was nearly dark.

THE END OF THE SEASON

Fish after fish disregarded my fly and went on rising within a few inches of it. Evening rises can be extraordinarily difficult. Trout in the opal dusk look so easy and are so hard, far harder than at the stillest and hottest of noons, for they are far more particular about the fly. You get many advantages in the evening. You can get nearer your fish, you can stand up, you can use thicker gut and larger hooks; but they are all counterbalanced by the trout's tiresome habit of refusing to mix his courses at his evening meal. He wants one fly and one fly only. In the daytime, whether you hit upon exactly the right artificial or not, you can usually catch something: but in the evening, you catch nothing unless your fly is right. And in the failing light it is difficult to see what they are taking. It is often not the fly which is thickest. I remember many instances of that, as does every fisherman. There was a big hatch of blue-winged olives on the Kennet late one July evening. It was a wonderful sight, for there was a trout rising every few yards, and I went on wildly casting fly after fly over fish after fish, too stupid and excited to stop and think, hoping that among so many there must be one to make a mistake. But none did. None looked at me. I could neither catch them nor put them down. At last in desperation I did what I ought to have done at first. I got into the reeds as close as I could to a rising fish—it was nearly dark and I got right over him—and found he was letting the large olives pass and taking a small straw-coloured spinner. That there was still time to land a brace was a piece of undeserved good fortune.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

And so it happened on the Test also. The trout rose, and rose continually, and rose in quantities. In front and behind, to right and to left, they took something within an inch of my fly, but my fly they would not take. There they were, gorging themselves with that stupid, light-hearted greediness peculiar to evening rises, which drives you crazy. They rose ahead of me, they rose behind me, they rose under my rod. Not a chance did I get till nearly dark. That is always humiliating, for it means that you have been beaten when the game was fair, and successful only when the odds were heavily in your favour. You feel that had the contest been played properly the trout would have won. It is like standing at the end of a cover and missing all the jolly, fast, high birds, and then making up a meagre score on the fluffers which waddle out at the end of the beat. I did nothing till the last quarter of an hour, and then I had four chances. One rose and was missed. A second was hooked, but jumped and wriggled off. A third was hooked, apparently in the middle of his fat body, and escaped after an exciting battle. And a fourth was caught on a red quill No. 1. He weighed 1 lb. 12 oz.

So the five weighed altogether 8 lb. 2 oz., a good day. Doubtless there were many risen and not hooked, and other small ones put back; but of these there is no record.

My other autumn day was not strictly September at all, for it was the last day of August 1923, and it was on the Bourne and not the Test. The two makers of this book had been staying at Hurst-

THE END OF THE SEASON

bourne Priors for a week of wild weather, and this was our last day. We were busy in the morning till twelve, and then a longing to fish seized both simultaneously. We walked down to where the Bourne runs into the broader waters of Murstbourne Park, in order to fish up, the artist with rod and I with net. There we met a fisherman who had worked all the way up from the mouth, and not seen a fish stir, and was off home. He was discouraged, but I was not, for had I not seen a newly hatched olive in the air and a trout on the top of the water? And sure enough, as soon as we got rigged up, there was a trout, and he took a ooo Lock's fancy, and when I had netted him the wind had dropped and olives hatched, and when we got back to a late lunch the artist had caught his limit, for I was carrying three brace of golden trout, all about of a size, none under a pound and none over a pound and a half.

There is nothing very special to be said about September fishing, except that it is very good. You get calm days and heavy hatches, and sometimes big fish. Remember, too, that the bigger the fish the later he comes into condition in the spring and therefore the longer he stays so in the autumn. The thirteen-inch fish which was plump in April will be a sad sight in September; but that lanky fellow whom you returned so reluctantly may well have fattened into a three pounder. As to flies, you will find that unconsciously you tend to the larger patterns such as the variant and caperer. The variant has its fervent admirers and its bitter detractors: I am neither one nor the other: but I believe in it late in the season. No doubt spinners

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

have their place, and that useful nondescript, the pheasant tail, and of course nymphs: but September is above all a floating fly month, of larger sizes. Many fishermen, indeed, use sedges in the day-time, however hot the sun and clear the water, and of late years I have killed many good trout with a special small dark sedge, on a No. 1 or 2 hook. I do little with the alder, which indeed I hardly ever use—but many fish have I killed with the caperer. Never be afraid of putting it on. On days when the surface of the river is as burnished metal, when the thinnest gut looks like a blind-cord, when you reduce your flies smaller and smaller, but still the insolent trout disregard your almost invisible badger smuts or houghton rubies; why then, reel in and knot on your biggest caperer. Do not be afraid. Never mind that not one of the real insects is to be seen: never mind that the trout are obviously taking spinners: never mind that so heavy a fly falls with what seems a sickening thump on the polished stillness of the water: never mind that to your eye, as you stoop far below and blink anxiously along the glittering surface, this great fly, projected as it is between the crystalline rim of the river and the burning blue of the sky, seems as monstrous, as uncouth and as unpalatable as an autumn leaf or the feather of a cock turkey: never mind all that, for you may be sure that it will have not floated far before a trout will have gulped it, if there be a trout within reach. And then, oh, my brother, oh, my erring brother, do not behave as I always do, and strike too soon. Remember, what I always fail to remember, that you have been fishing with small

THE END OF THE SEASON

flies and that this is a large one, and that large ones require time to swallow.

As has been said, the charm of September is that it is a floating fly month. Fish rise more freely than in July or August, and there is often more fly. Consequently, for those who prefer the dry fly to the nymph, it is a good month. The hatches of olives are sometimes very big indeed. It is interesting to cast one's mind back and recall the biggest numbers of fly one has seen. On the whole big hatches are less common on the Test than they were forty years ago. But, without doubt they have increased in the last ten years, and will probably continue to do so. But though I have seen the fly coming down in droves on the Test, it is not there that memory recalls those immense volumes which are perhaps seen only three or four times in a lifetime. A really big hatch is an event which has to be seen to be understood. Of the two biggest I have known, only one was in September, and neither was on the Test; but I should add that I have never been there on a great grannom day, which must be something quite extraordinary. No. My two days were one on the Kennet, which is already described in the chapter on the mayfly, and one at Driffild. It was on 12th September 1919, a cold, wild and wet day, with an east wind. At a quarter to one I was walking up, and as I came suddenly in sight of a long stretch of the upper water it looked as though someone had strewn chaff all over it. From bank to bank the surface was literally discoloured with fly. Olives were coming down in such quantities that figures became meaningless. The river was

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

low, the current weak and the wind against it. Driven upstream by the wild gusts, the fly was packed solid in all the little bays and inlets of the banks, and yet the main stream was as full of them as ever. In all these bays were the trout, eating the fly as fast as they could open and shut their mouths. And this went on for two hours.

I have seen olives thick on the water at Whitchurch on the Test. I can recall hot June evenings on the Itchen at St. Cross when the blue-winged olives sailed down in fleet after fleet. On the Kennet at Ramsbury the same fly on still July nights would start at sundown and go on getting thicker and thicker till long after dark. At Rowsley on the Derbyshire Wye I have known the iron blues darken the surface. At Stockbridge on stormy days I have seen the same. But never in my life have I seen anything like that September afternoon.

So September fishing is good, because you get much fly and free-rising trout. No doubt as you walk the bank you meet signs in plenty that the fisherman's life is above all a transitory one. In May the hawthorns at the foot of the chalk cliff were covered as with fallen snow, while now they are ruddy with their winter crop. The flock of sheep, which in June rested like a cloud on the high down, cropping thyme and short grasses, is now penned in the valley, munching the soulless turnip. Through the quiet air comes the distant pop of the partridge shooter. The season is passing. But these restful, golden days have a charm of their own. It is as though the great wheel of the year hung for a

THE END OF THE SEASON

moment in its course to enable you to enjoy it to the full, before turning over and plunging into that winter which both trout and those who fish for them find so uninteresting.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST

To build the trout a crystal stair.

The Whole Duty of Berkshire Brooks.

By GRACE HAZARD CONKLING. 1915.

CHALK STREAMS HAVE FEW TRIBUTARIES. THEY are fed from springs, which garner the rain over a wide area of downland, and this percolates by underground ways to the river. There must be concealed watercourses, for the contents of these springs must somehow reach the river; but whereas northern and western rivers have brooks and runnels of water flowing into them every mile or so, Hampshire rivers are not so augmented; and where again they are fed by their scarce tributaries, these are of substantial volume.

This chapter deals only with streams which join the trouting part of the Test, which may be taken to end at Romsey. Of these the most important is the Anton, which runs in at Fullerton. The lower Anton, soon after passing Andover, and still more from Clatford downwards, is a deep, fast river, in all ways like the Test itself, a resemblance unfortunately accentuated by the fact that both valleys have railways along them. It is only in the upper waters that you get the true tributary character;

THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST

clear, gentle streams, flowing over white chalk and yellow gravel, their water unimaginably pure, their course choked with watercress and river weeds, running past quiet, thatched villages, in country that can have changed little in a thousand years. Two such brooks make up the Anton: one, the main source, runs through Andover, and the other, marked on the map under the imaginative name of Little Ann, but usually called unromantically Pill or Pillhill Brook, comes in at Upper Clatford. I had one of the most charming days of my life on it. It was years ago, in 1901, on the 9th August, a hot day in a hot summer. I went there from a more classic fishing. The attraction, and a great one, of these streams is that you can treat them lightly. When fishing famous water you are conscious of tension. You are on your mettle, and you have as opponents trout of whose cunning you have had long experience. But you can relax before the trout of brooks. True, you must not take liberties, for the water is transparent, the fish visible, you have to cast softly and accurately into the little runs between weeds, and you must do a lot of creeping and crawling. But, given this, trout rise confidently and take firmly. And when you land them they are golden as the gravel on which they lie.

It was mid-day before I reached the water. It was full of trout. Not many were rising, but, if they were lying near the top and a oo red quill were drifted over them, a nose would come up and the fly would go down. I picked up trout after trout, and when I turned out my bag at the top of the beat

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

there were three and a half brace in it. That, thought I, is enough; but the keeper urged me to go on. It had been an unusually hot and rainless summer, and he expected that the water I was fishing would dry up; he wanted me to take out as many as I could. Accordingly, after a cup of tea, we met for the evening rise. I could now pick and choose, for I did not mean to be too murderous, in spite of the keeper. I started off with a fine trout, of over 1 lb.—large for that water, where they ran from 12 oz. upwards—and then, when the evening hatch really began, it would have been possible to fill a wheelbarrow. Altogether, without counting undersized fish, I landed eleven brace of takeable trout, and kept five and a half brace. Two scenes especially remain in my memory. It was dusk, the warm violet dusk of an August evening, and I was at a place where the brook broadened into a shallow, almost streamless ford, over which trout were cruising slowly, good trout, their back fins out of water. By bending down and getting the light right I could make out their shadowy forms, and, above all, see in which direction they were swimming: and then a red quill dropped in the line of their route was usually taken. That was one scene: it yielded a good fish or two. The other was the place I had mentally kept to the last, for it might produce a big one: a deep, still hatch hole, with a small waterfall at the top. A floating alder caught fish after fish: nothing big, but I fished on and on in hope, in spite of frantic shouts from the driver of the trap, who assured me I should miss the train. At last I had to give up expectation of

THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST

anything large, and went off with my eleven fish, more than content.

Next to the Anton, and in some ways superior, is the famous Bullington Stream, called in its upper reaches the Dever, so great a favourite of Halford. It rises near Micheldever, on the edge of the Itchen valley, and runs past Stoke Charity, Sutton Scotney and Bullington. Then it goes through the delightful Bransbury Common, where redshanks pipe continually and snipe drum from dawn till dusk, and falls into the Test near Wherwell. If I were asked to put my finger on the heart of Hampshire, I should place it on the high ground west of Micheldever which separates the Itchen valley from that of the Test. It has no particular features, and possibly does not appeal to others as it appeals to me. It is an open stretch of cultivated land, covered by a wide sky, bare and deserted looking, studded with solitary farms. And, if I were told to be more particular, and to pick out the very core and centre of this stretch, it is one of these very farms which I should choose. Stoke Charity Farm, with its red roof, its garden containing splendid topiary yews, and its musical name, is typical of much which endears Hampshire to its lovers.

Like the Anton, the Bullington Stream is in two sections. The lower part is undistinguishable from one of the many arms into which the middle Test divides itself, and its trout are as big and even warier than those of the main river. I have fished it, believing I was fishing the Test. But its upper part, at the little village of Bransbury and above, is a rippling, clear, winding stream, weed-choked and

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

in parts overhung with alders and willows. It is a real tributary stream, now narrow, now widening into broader shallows, where active trout keep their places in the sharp runs between the weeds, and cattle cool their legs on hot days. I have never fished it: trout do not run large, and are taken out at a pound weight or less.

Towards the bottom of the trouting part of the Test, at Kimbridge, there comes in from the west a substantial stream, nameless on maps, called by fishermen the Dun, but locally the Barge River. Part of its course was once a canal, hence its name: one of those canals which formerly existed all over England, but which were carelessly neglected when railways came. This special one joined the Avon to the Test, and connected Salisbury with Southampton and the sea. Its banks can still be seen. This Dun or Barge River is mentioned by Durnford as being good for mayfly; and indeed, when this insect was failing at Stockbridge, supplies of it were exported from the Dun to restock that famous fishery. It still keeps up its old reputation. It is a smallish stream above Lockerley Green, but here it is augmented by a large spring called Weymouth Water, one of those wide and deep springs which occur only in a chalk country. From here it soon becomes of substantial volume, and when it flows through Dunbridge can be called a river. Its upper valley is one of the most pleasing in Hampshire, and I know few sights more agreeable than the view across it to the bold sweep of Dean Hill, on a fine day in early June, before the colours of grass and bushes and forest trees have taken on their

THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST

summer sameness. But as a trout stream the Dun does not rank high. It is not a true chalk stream, and its lower lengths are frequently discoloured. It is more famous for its grayling: but in the bottom reaches near its mouth, the only part I have fished, it is a pleasant, quick water, holding good trout.

There are one or two small feeders of the Test of which I know nothing, such as the brook which comes in from the east just south of Timsbury. More considerable is Wallop Brook, farther north and on the west, rising between Middle and Nether Wallop and joining the Test above Bossington. It is a merry, dancing water, flowing past farms and villages where not only the houses, but also the garden walls are thatched. I have never fished it, but am told that it was once full of trout, but that many died in the rainless year of 1921, when much of it dried up. The King's Somborne Stream, one of the smallest of feeders, joins the main river at Horsebridge, where it forms part of the Stockbridge fishery. I have caught wonderfully good trout in it.

Lastly, there is the first tributary the Test receives, the Bourne. This actually rises at Hurstbourne Tarrant, the Uphusband of William Cobbett, but is hardly fishable until it passes under the Southern Railway close to Hurstbourne Station. It flows through Hurstbourne Park, and reaches the Test between Whitchurch and Longparish. The lower part holds good fish, not so many two-pounders as in old days, though they can be caught. In the middle reaches are fish up to a pound and a half, and in the upper, round about a pound: whilst all

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

over, in selected places, much larger and warier inhabitants lurk, as in all chalk streams. No rivulet has clearer water, greener weeds, or more glowing fish: there is not a grayling or a roach or a dace in it: it holds trout and trout only, as chalk streams should do. I can recall more than one good day there. It is one of the most productive and best of the smaller streams. Once, early in July 1923, I spent a fruitless and hot morning on the upper Test: not a fish stirred, and at three o'clock I could have sworn that nothing could have brought me to the river again that day. But great is fishing: I had tea in a garden actually bounded by the Bourne and what should a trout do but rise constantly whilst I was sitting in the shade! That could not be resisted, and I settled down to him. He refused an olive and a red quill, but there is something about a pheasant tail which Bourne trout find particularly entrancing. The first time the fly came properly over that Bourne trout—it was a difficult place for drag—he had it, and proved to be well over 1 lb. And above him another was rising, and he took the pheasant tail too; and so did a third; both good fish. This, be it noted, was at five o'clock (four o'clock ordinary time) on a blazing July day, whilst not a fish had moved in the morning. How often have I found that, in settled summer weather, afternoon beats morning: but the weather must be settled as well as hot.

Encouraged by this I waited with confidence for the evening rise. It started at about nine o'clock, trout took the red quill very well, and I had no difficulty in making up the three brace I was

THE TRIBUTARIES OF THE TEST

allowed to catch. To succeed after failure is one of the greatest joys of fishing.

The ideal trout water should combine the main river, with its cunning trout, hard work, long casting and general effort and strain, with some slighter stream, holding smaller and more amenable fish, where no great exertion is required, and your feelings are as peaceful as your surroundings. It is agreeable to interpolate such days among more strenuous ones. And some of these smaller valleys are less spoilt than that of the Test. This still remains beautiful, and will always be so. But it is not improved by a railway along its whole length, and by the many houses built on its banks, not all of them in a style in keeping with their surroundings. You do not get these blots in the smaller valleys, and instead you are constantly looking at land which has changed little since the Conquest, and at villages where hardly a cottage is later than the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER XII

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

But, for a whole County, Hampshire bears the Bell away for its many great and small, swift, shallow, clear, lovely and pleasant Rivers and Brooks, abounding in admirable Trouts.

The Angler's Sure Guide.

By ROBERT HOWLETT. 1706.

FRANCIS FRANCIS ONCE SAID THAT, WHILE SOME fishing was better than other, there was no such thing as bad fishing; and the same may be said of days. If you cast your mind back even over your really bad ones, over those when you fished all day and caught nothing, of how many of them can you say that they were unavoidable blanks—that they were days when to catch fish was impossible? Very few indeed, hardly any. On most of them, as you walk home in the dusk by the sounding river, which always sounds so much louder at night, you say to yourself: Ah, if Such-an-One had been in my place he would have made that two-pounder take instead of only nosing. Or, He would have held that big one more bravely and kept him out of weed. Or, He would have held him more delicately and not broken. This is the usual state of mind: very seldom can we say that we have had an essential blank. There are some such, but not many, and

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

they are due chiefly to weather. There are days when it is impossible to go out, and there are days when not a fly appears and trout are hidden. But such days are rare. They do not account for more than a few of our failures.

Indeed weather is not of the importance sometimes ascribed to it. Not many days are bad all through. The worst usually have a period of betterment. Consequently you should never let weather keep you indoors. You can never tell what the day will become. In fact, though you can foretell a good day, no man alive can foretell a bad one. If you get a morning in mid-May when the breeze is light and upstream, when the sky is blue with fleecy clouds and the air buoyant and nimble, you can be certain of a rise. But even if it is blowing a gale, or snowing, or there is a hammering downstream wind and a hard, steely sky, or the heat is tropical and there is no ~~breath of~~ air, you cannot be certain there will not be one. The fisherman who knows his profession is more independent of weather than writers would have us believe. And of all fishermen those of Hampshire are the most independent, for two reasons. Chalk streams neither flood nor discolour¹ nor get low. They are not fed by surface water, either themselves or their tributaries, but by springs welling up through the chalk. Rain, when it falls, soaks gently through the porous down, and goes to replenish the pure, unseen lakes which feed those springs.

¹ I fear that this, and what follows, is not so true as it used to be. The Test is quite distinctly more liable to discolour.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

It does not rush in turmoil to the river, bearing with it the refuse and impurities of the upper soil. It percolates, drop by drop, through the mighty secular filter which spreads for miles on both sides of the valley, until, cleansed of all defilements and gaining a sparkle and a lustre which makes it the most delicate liquid in the world, it reaches those distant and hidden recesses where it is stored until, in due time, it is delivered up into the stainless river. You remember that day with the mayfly in June, when you rejoiced to see the Test running full and fresh and strong, as though fed by new rain? Not a drop of that water had fallen later than the previous February: it was garnered from winter storms: and that heavy shower which now is sweeping on you from the high down and will drive you to shelter, not a drop of that will be in the river before late autumn. Therefore the Test usually runs clear, except after heavy and continuous rain, or occasionally after dry weather, when a sudden shower sweeps into it the fine, white dust lying thick on the roads. But that does not happen very often. And it is rarely flooded. And similarly it never runs very low, for just as a lake regulates the flow of a river, so these underground storehouses regulate the flow of chalk streams. Their volume varies little.

To put it in other words, weather can spoil sport in four ways. First it can affect the angler, for it may either compel him to stay indoors, or the gale may be so terrific that he cannot cast, or his line may freeze in the rings, or it may be so hot that he cannot leave the shade: that is, if it ever be too hot in

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

England. Secondly, it can disturb the water, by making it either too high or too low or too thick or too clear. Thirdly, it can upset the trout, making them disinclined to feed. And fourthly, it can prevent fly from hatching. These are the four ways in which weather acts on fishing, and of these only the last deeply concerns the dry fly fisherman. The first need hardly be regarded, for weather is rarely bad enough to prevent you leaving the house and getting a line out. And the second and third do not greatly hamper the dry fly man, for his rivers are never too high or too low and are rarely too thick, and the clearer his water is the better he is pleased: nor are his trout seriously affected, for if fly hatches they usually eat it. Therefore he is more or less immune from three out of four disadvantages. But he pays for this by the extent to which he is exposed to the fourth, for he is absolutely dependent on fly, and on weather which produces fly.

What weather do we want for fly? Much has been written about that, but, at the risk of being wearisome, I shall write something more. Most writers go wrong, with respect be it said, in talking as though you always wanted the same. As a fact, different weather is wanted at different times of the year. From the first of April down to about the middle of May the trout's surface food is provided by the daily hatch of duns and fall of spinner. We all know the manner of these early hatches of duns. They begin and end suddenly. Before and after you will not get a fish: during the rise they take freely. Olives or iron blues appear suddenly and

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

as suddenly cease. Before they come you can sit on the bank and watch the unbroken water: when they end you can go home and have tea. That is the first stage of the Angler's Year.

As May runs towards June, as kingcup and cuckoo flowers disappear, as purple orchises replace cowslips in the meadows, and yellow irises convert the banks into a Japanese garden, the habits of olives change with the changing year. The large dark winter dun is followed by the smaller light or dark olive, reinforced by the iron blue and later by the pale watery dun. The beginning and end of the hatch are less marked, and it becomes more languid and spreads out. Also, and this is a point on which I want to insist, the daily hatch of duns is not the only surface food trout get. There appear those flies which, unlike the duns, love hot weather, such as sedges, alders, caperers, black gnats and smuts. Spinners, too, are more plentiful, and many creatures show themselves which were absent earlier in the season. Spiders, moths, caterpillars, ants—many are the insects which chance or a strong breeze or pure stupidity scatters on the surface. These the trout eat, and from them and from the surfeit thus provided they acquire the commendable habit of looking upwards. They expect the top of the water to act as a moving carrier, bringing provender to their mouths, without the trouble of hunting, as they hunt for minnows or nymphs or shrimps. And, since they look up, they will take a floating fly even when not rising. And, moreover, that important event, the evening rise, starts. For all these reasons, during this, the second

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

stage of the Angler's Year, trout have much more surface food provided for them than the monotonous olive. This stage lasts roughly from the middle of May to some date in August, varying with the river. Then begins the third stage which lasts till the end of the season. During its continuance trout become rather more dependent on the daily hatch of duns, though the hot weather insects still add a variety to their meals.

During the first stage you must have duns, or you catch nothing, and duns do best in coldish weather: but at the very beginning, in early April, when it is not too cold. At that time a typical April day is best; sun and cloud and shower and soft breezes. But even the coldest and wildest weather will not keep the fly back entirely. In April 1922 I was salmon fishing on the Spey: on the 17th it was bitterly cold: snow lay low on Ben Rinnes and the surrounding hills, and flurries of it swept down from the north from time to time. During one of the worst of these the march browns hatched out gaily, and those delicate creatures, which look as though a gust would disintegrate them, sailed unharmed until they met a trout. It was a big show. But the next day, the 18th April, when it was fine and warm with a light wind, there was a really great hatch, infinitely more than the day before. So in the early part of the season, you want a touch of warmth; but as you get towards May you do better in the cold. A wind either east or north-east, or north or north-west, is then best. If you were back from France in the spring of 1918, turn up once more the 27th and 28th April in your diary, if you

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

keep one. The 27th was hot and cloudless, like June. There was a poor, straggling show of olives, and with labour I got two small fish. The 28th was one of the most awful days imaginable. There was a savage north-east wind, the sky was grey and the air freezingly cold: yet at three o'clock—late for April, very late for that bitter cold, and when the weather was at its worst—olives appeared in masses and lasted till six, and I got four brace. These two occasions illustrate very clearly the weather conditions of spring. Between the 17th April on the Spey (where you must reckon that the 17th April corresponds to 1st April in the south) and the 27th April in southern England, the change from the first to the second part of the first stage had taken place. In the first, though cold does not prevent fly from hatching, you get more on warm days. In the second you get more on cold.

When, however, mid-May is past, and the second stage of the Angler's Year begins, conditions are totally different. The daily birth of ephemerids is not the only event. The air and the bushes and the grasses are full of life. The warm-weather insects, such as sedges, smuts, black gnats, alders and caperers appear. And the summer brings a mass of food on to the water, and the trout have grown even more accustomed to surface feeding. On the whole, therefore, you do best on hot days, especially in June or when June merges into July. The daily hatch may be weaker, but the settled warm weather brings trout to the top. So pray for hot days, hot days and windless. Never be afraid of heat, for as long as no thunder is about it cannot

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

be too hot. I will take an example, one out of many, from the remarkable year 1921, when we really had something which might be called summer. By July surface-fed rivers had reached their lowest record, some had dried up, grass fields were burnt brown, with turf as hard as stone. I was fishing on the 23rd and 24th July. The 23rd ought to have been good, for it was a warm, cloudy day with that westerly wind which our ancestors loved. I got one fish. But on the next day, cloudless, windless, and glittering, I got two and a half brace (and returned several takeable fish), and got most of them about mid-day when the sun beat down with tropic heat and the surface of the water was as burnished steel. No, you need never be afraid of heat, or brightness, or calm.

It is for these reasons that summer fishing with the dry fly is so good, and, let me add, so delectable. You can fish for so many hours in the day: you can do well in such a variety of weather, and you do best in the merry heat of midsummer. If it be cold, you may get a large show of olives or iron blues or pale wateries: if it be hot, these may be scarcer, but still trout are moving all day. In fact you have too much fishing and are apt to go on too long, when you never fish well. And there is the evening rise, to be described later.

During the third stage of the Angler's Year, from mid-August to the end of the season, you get a partial reversion to the first, in that trout depend more on duns and these hatch more freely. And though you do well in settled fine weather, you also get big hatches, and they will come usually

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

on cold days. But you need never be afraid of heat.

Chalk-stream trout, except at certain seasons, do not rise much after dark. There is no regular midnight rise, as there is in northern waters. But they may move at any time during daylight: I have known them busy at five in the morning and earlier. But if you take my advice you will not go in for fishing before breakfast, unless it is the only fishing you can get. You will spoil your temper and catch little. I like to be out by eight (ordinary, not summer time) but nine o'clock is generally early enough. In April, and again in September, you will not do much until eleven; and it may be twelve, one, two or even three o'clock before there is any movement. Very rarely, if there is to be a rise at all, is it delayed till after three. Between eleven and one is the usual time. But when May and June come you often get early, eight or nine o'clock, rises, particularly on cold mornings, and on hot days you get late afternoon hatches at four or five o'clock. A lot of nonsense is still talked about hot weather encouraging the fly. When people say this, they mean one of three quite different things, which, by the way, they fail to distinguish. They may mean that in a warm year or warm spell, fly such as the mayfly appears earlier than its usual date. Or they may mean that you get more fly on a hot day than on a cold. Or that on a hot day fly appears at an earlier hour. Those are three very different statements. Let us look at them. There cannot, by the way, be a fourth alternative, that in a warm year more fly appears than in a cold; for nymphs due to

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

hatch in any year must do so some time, whatever the weather.

First. Does fly which has a well-marked date of appearance come earlier in a warm year and later in a cold? Now, there are three insects which appear so suddenly and in such numbers that their advent cannot be missed: the march brown, the grannom and the mayfly. Of the march brown I have much experience, but few records: of the grannom, no experience and no records: but of the mayfly I have over twenty years' continuous history. I have examined the records of Ramsbury on the Kennet. They give, not the time of appearance of the mayfly, but, what is just as useful, the day when the first fish was killed on it; and they give this from 1899 to the present date. About 1907 the fly began to disappear, and it became uncertain and irregular, and it did not come back in force until 1922: but taking the figures for eight years, from 1899 to 1906, there is only a difference of four days between the earliest and latest date at which the first fish was caught. The earliest is 3rd June, the latest 7th June. Those years exhibited the usual variations of our delectable climate. My own observation during forty years confirms this, and I believe profoundly that the warmth or coldness of the season makes not a day's difference in the appearance of *ephemeridæ* such as march brown or mayfly or olive or iron blue. I believe them to be totally independent of it. So much for warm years bringing up fly. I am talking entirely of *ephemeridæ*, for insects such as alders, sedges, or smuts, undoubtedly do prosper in heat.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

Second. Do you get more fly on a warm day than on a cold? No. You get less, except perhaps at the very beginning and end of the season. I am talking, be it noted again, of *ephemeridæ*. They hatch best on a cold day. Every writer of real importance for the last hundred and seventy years has said this: entomologists agree that the hatched fly lives longer in cold weather: and yet you are continually met with the fatuous remark that the fly is not hatching because the day is too cold. As a matter of fact, olives and iron blues, march browns and mayflies all hatch better on a cold day—except in early spring or late autumn. I am talking of hatches during daytime. You may get a quantity of fly on a warm evening, and you very often do. But this is because the evening has followed a still hotter day, when the heat has retarded the coming of fly, concentrating it in the cool that follows sundown.

Third. Does fly appear earlier in the day in warm weather than in cold? This is a much more debatable question. Let me go step by step. If my answer to question number two is right and you see more duns on a cold day than on a hot, this means that the nymph living at the bottom does know what the upper air is like, and it has some instinct or volition which enables it to choose, within limits, its time for rising to the top and splitting open. I do not think that this will be denied; and marvellous as it is, it is nothing like so incomprehensible as some of the miracles which instinct works in insect life. To say nothing of such well-known creatures as bees or ants, the life history

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

of some of the parasitic flies, such as the ichneumon fly, *Rhyssa persuasoria*, whose larva lives upon the larva of the saw fly, involves acts of what looks like inherited knowledge and reasoning power, before which the power of the ephemerid nymph to judge the temperature of an air of which it knows nothing seems insignificant. I think fishermen, and entomologists too, admit this capacity: and since there is some selection, it will be used to bring out the subimago either on the most suitable day, or if so wide a choice is not possible, at the most suitable hour of the appointed day. The most suitable time is that in which the perfect insect will have the longest life, and that entomologists have proved to be a cold period. I believe, therefore, that ephemerid nymphs, wishing the perfect insect to live as long as possible, choose to turn into subimagos on cold days, or if this be impossible, during the cool period of hot days: that on cold days the hatch is early: that in settled hot weather it is put off as long as can be, and may occur as late as four or even five in the afternoon: and that it can be, and is sometimes, put off until sunset and the coolness which sunset brings. I should add that, of course, the word "choose" and words implying conscious action are used to express that which we call instinct, or whatever name we may apply to knowledge which seems to be the inherited possession of a race, held by them in common; and that this choice is limited, for probably the date of the splitting open of the nymphal envelope is fixed by development and can only be hastened or delayed for a short time.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

I cannot give proof that fly appears earlier on cold days, I can only give instances. And first of all let me describe a class of day we have all known, which indeed first made me think. Take one in mid-June. It is hot and still. You, who have been taught that in heat you should be out early, are on the water by nine. Trout are moving. They move all the morning. Now they take a smut, then a spinner, then something below the surface. You always have an object to fish for: but they are extraordinarily difficult, you have to cast countless times with many flies before they look at you, and by three o'clock you are exhausted and your bag empty. By three, the books tell you, the best of a June day is over till the evening: but you are young and keen and slave on till four. Then you plod home. But as you are walking back, hot, tired and disillusioned, suddenly olives appear: olives, against all rules, at four o'clock on a June afternoon: and, against all rules, trout start rising in determined fashion. But the rise is no good to you, for either you are so weary that you go home, or if you fish you do it badly. No sport in the world is so exhausting as dry fly fishing with a light single-handed rod, and no sport exacts a higher standard of performance. You have used up your energy and cannot apply it when most wanted.

Has not every fisher had that experience? But let me say I do not think it occurs until you get settled fine weather, in June or July. Then often the afternoon beats the morning. You do not notice this, because you are busy all the morning with the casuals which always move during a June

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

day. What first brought this home to me was an experience on 21st June 1915. In that month, tired of digging holes in the heavy clay of Northumberland and seeing no immediate chance of getting to France, I got sick-leave from a kindly doctor and rushed to the Kennet. I fished eight days between 11th and 22nd June, in settled hot weather, and got forty-three fish. The rise was late on most of them, late in the afternoon, and on 21st June particularly did not start till four, and I missed it. That made me think, and I realized that the other days had been the same. And, looking back, I have had many similar experiences.

Just as I believe that heat retards the hatch, so does cold accelerate it. If you get a sharpish day in May, you often get a rise as early as nine o'clock; it is usually short, and then nothing till one. Fishermen frequently miss it through not being out early enough. They come out at ten and find no fly till one; and, Ah, they say, it is a cold day, and therefore the hatch is late, it is always so. As a matter of fact, the opposite is the case. Because it was a cold day there was an early rise, which they have missed, and they take the second rise for the first.

That is the result of my experience of the influence of weather on fly. A warm year does not mean the earlier appearance of mayfly or march brown. A warm day does not produce more fly than a cold, but less. On a warm day the hatch is later in the day than on a cold. But do not let me dogmatize. You can never say that fly will not hatch or that trout will not rise, for there is no rule in fishing

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

which is absolute. Granted that you generally get more olives on a cold day than on a warm, still the exceptions will be so numerous that any statement you make can be true only upon balance. A south-west wind, low, heavy clouds and warm air usually mean a bad day; but I had one of the great days of my life on such a one, 26 July 1918. And exceptions such as this are so numerous in the course of a lifetime that you cannot afford to take risks. No. Be on the water every minute that you can without exhausting yourself. Do not fish all the time: fish slowly and cast rarely. Cunning trout are caught by much watching and little fishing. So will you get good days, and so will you make the most of bad ones.

I have said earlier in this chapter that weather affects sport in four ways: it influences either the fisherman, or the water, or the fish, or the fly. Fisherman, water and fly have been dealt with, and it now remains to consider trout. Chalk-stream fish, as has been said, are less likely to be put off by unfavourable weather than are those of the north: if there be fly, they usually feed, whatever the conditions: but all the same, atmosphere and temperature do affect them. A long spell of great heat takes away a trout's appetite, and so does a long spell of cold; but if fly appears, do not be afraid of either. Cold days are better than hot, for appetite as well as for fly. Up-stream wind is better than down. Thunder is usually bad, until the storm bursts. The best sky is one that is cloudy and clear together, blue mixed with silver; and the next best, one that is grey with blue patches. Cloudless

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

blue comes next, and then come different shades of grey with no blue, and last of all, one that is the same grey all over, whether the colour be heavy and dark or light and steely. That is the very worst. Light, the condition of the atmosphere, is much more important than sky. We all know what is meant by "a bad light." Water is unnaturally transparent, and trout unnaturally conspicuous: the trees are sharply defined, but there are no depths in their colour: there is a haze on the horizon: the ripples of the river are not clear blue-black but dirty, like soapy water: you feel jumpy and without confidence. Ah, we all know it. Trout are usually shy on such days. But particularly are they so on days of diffused light, when the sky is covered all over by a grey mantle, not too thick. This is why trout are certainly often harder on a dull day than a clear. But my experience is contradictory. Sometimes the lightest cast sends them careering off with a stupid loutishness which makes you want to throw a brick at them: at other times, under conditions apparently the same, you cannot put them down, but you also cannot catch them, and you equally want to stone them. I do not know what it is. But I do know this. Trout are never so hard to catch as when they are hard to put down. It is as though they knew all about you and laughed at your harmlessness. They do not the least mind your casting over them, because they have no intention of mistaking your clumsy artificial for their natural fly. And, on the contrary, when trout are easy to put down they are often easy to catch.

Rain is often good, light, warm rain nearly always

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

so. Sometimes it makes the trout so silly that you can get quite close to them. Especially good is quiet rain after a dry spell. What memories come back to the mind of such days! The most symbolic which occurred to me was not on the Test, nor indeed in Hampshire, but far away on one of the smallest, most difficult, most productive and most beloved of Cumberland streams. In the year 1912 May had been dry and hot. On 2nd June there was a light rain, too light to affect the water, and on 3rd June a windless drizzle. The stream was dead low, and trout had been nearly unapproachable. Two rods were fishing on 3rd June: the first started at a quarter to twelve and the second not till three, when the best of the rise was over. However, by half-past five, when the water began to colour and fishing had to stop, they had caught five and twenty, besides many small ones put back. What they would have got had both fished all day I do not know. It would have been one of those immense catches of which we read in Stoddart. And all this was due to the combination of rain with low water. Before the rain came trout were mighty hard to get. Be it noted, too, that the rain brought up a large hatch of light olives, and that every fish was caught on the old and admirable yellow dun, dressed with a starling wing, body of greenish yellow floss silk (or, better still, thread waxed golden olive) and ginger hackle.

A far cry, this, from Hampshire, though possibly not so far as it seems. Perhaps one who has caught trout from Switzerland to well inside the Arctic Circle, where from mid-May to mid-July there is

GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

one continuous day and the sun sets not for two months: and from Kent in the east to Canada in the west, may be allowed to say that they are much the same all over the world.

But, though light rain is good, and has the added advantage of keeping the fly on the water, heavy rain is not. Nor are gales, which fly seem to hate as much as I do.

CHAPTER XIII
THE EVENING RISE

The jealous Trout, that low did lie,
Rose at a wel-dissembled Flie.

On a Banck as I sate a Fishing.

By SIR HENRY WOTTON. 1651.

SOME TIME AFTER MID-MAY THE EVENING RISE starts, and lasts till the end of the season. There is a great difference between different rivers. On the Test and Itchen you do not get it before May is well on its way, and the same on the Hertford and Dorset streams: on Driffeld Beck not till June. On the Kennet, on the other hand, you get it from earliest times. I have known it in April, and on cold nights, too. But it is nowhere in full swing until June, and one part of it, the sedge rise, till July. It is an unsatisfactory thing, this evening rise. You get fish, certainly, but you seldom get as many as you feel you ought. And the mind is weighted with an unpleasant apprehension of finality. Daylight has a definite end which nothing can prolong. A morning rise, starting at eleven, may last an hour or it may last five. It has the charm of uncertainty and of hope. But an evening rise has a fixed limit. There is no scope for imagination or fortune, and the pleasures of fishing

THE EVENING RISE

are mental. The trout, too, during an evening rise are always difficult and often exasperating.

But before discussing that, it is necessary to analyse the rise in rather more detail. When the hay has been cut, and wet places are golden with mimulus, and the pomp of high summer is reigning, there are three evening rises. The first begins some time between six and seven (ordinary, not summer time) and lasts till shortly before sunset. This I call the casual rise. The second starts after the last edge of the sun has sunk below the actual horizon and ends when it is too dark to see a small artificial on the water. This is the small fly rise. The third rise then opens and runs for something under half an hour, rarely longer. This is the sedge rise. The casual rise may begin any time after six. Trout move languidly, often taking spinners, but sometimes indecipherable insects. They are difficult, because at no time in the twenty-four hours are they so readily put down. A cast which would pass muster in the stillest noon sends them off like a shot. I suppose this is due to the slanting light. And it is not easy to see what they are taking. Altogether they are a high test of skill. But they can be caught. Try them with the prevailing spinner, or a fancy fly such as the pheasant tail. A blue upright sometimes kills.

The small fly rise has a very different appearance indeed. If it be a good one, trout rise not languidly but eagerly, sometimes madly. And it starts with all the unexpected suddenness of the morning rises of early May. I recollect particularly the 25th July 1918. I was strolling up the bank on a quiet, warm

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

evening. A stile had to be crossed, and I remember stopping a minute or so before crossing it and watching the aquamarine sky and its reflection in the opal water. The stile lay a little back, behind a bushy willow, which shut out the water. Before crossing, not a ring was to be seen: when I had crossed, and cleared the willow, the surface was boiling. The movement had started as though on the stroke of a clock. And often this sudden beginning will come immediately after the last rim of the sun has disappeared.

During the casual rise fish are usually taking spinners, if spinners there be. On warm, still evenings, when the female fly can get back to the river to lay her eggs, there will be spinners. But if it be cold, and particularly if it be windy, the females are driven away, and none of them fall as spinners. Smuts, too, are often on the water at this time, or you may have a hatch of small sedges. If so you will find that trout take the artificial very well. During the small fly rise, trout may want either duns or spinners, or occasionally nymphs. It is often very difficult to see whether they are rising or bulging; or, if they are rising, what they are rising at. During the casual rise, too, the fish, though picksome and hard to please, are not particular about pattern: but during the small fly rise they settle down to one article and refuse everything else. Your fly must be exactly right, or you get nothing till dark. During the casual rise fish are often unapproachable; during the small fly rise they are easy to approach and hard to put down, but hard to catch. You no longer need crawl or kneel,

THE EVENING RISE

you can stand up. As the dusk deepens, you can get nearer and nearer. Your hook can be a size or two bigger, your gut thicker: though, if you take my advice, you will never, even for mayfly or sedge, use stronger than finest natural, for on that you can kill the biggest trout that swims. But in spite of the advantage of ease of access, larger flies and heavier gut, trout are harder to get: harder than they are in the heat of noon, with 4x points and 000 hooks. They are hard because they take only one kind of food and because they demand a higher standard of imitation. You must copy what they are eating and you must copy it in a way they like.

As I look back over many evening rises, I get the impression of more failures than successes. Not absolute failures, perhaps, but relative; one brings away the sense of not having done as well as one ought. Fish rise so confidently and so often: there are so many: you do not put them down, for they go on rising: but though they are taking winged fly, you they will not take. Rivers differ greatly in the ease with which fish are caught in the evening, and so do different parts of the same river. The Test is easier than the Itchen, and the Kennet a good deal harder than either. But the Test can be difficult enough.

Even if you see what the trout are gulping down, your troubles are not over. A typical summer evening fly is the blue-winged olive, and the best artificial is the orange quill. By the by, never be afraid of a large orange quill, up to No. 1. But sometimes they will not look at the orange quill or

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

at the coot-winged imitation, or at any olive or red or ginger quill that man's wit devised. Then you have an extremely difficult choice to make: are you to go on trying fly after fly, losing precious time in changing, and rattling your nerves, too, or are you to stick to what you think the best pattern? That is to say, are you to change your fly or change your fish?

Before answering that, let me ask you if you are sure that you know what trout are taking. Blue-winged olives are floating down, certainly, and fish are breaking the water: but are they feeding on the nymph or the winged fly or the spinner? It is wonderful how hard it is to tell this, in the lessening light. Anyhow, if the winged fly is refused, do not hesitate. Try the hackle blue-wing first, then the sherry spinner, and then the nymph sunk. The pattern of a nymph is given in a later chapter. However, since fishing books should be definite or nothing, I will tell you exactly how I do behave, not how I should. I try first an orange or red quill, according to river, then a hackle blue-wing unoled and awash, and then probably a sherry spinner. After that, I should think it useless to go on changing, and certainly at some time or other I should go back to the fly I thought best. Whether my final choice were an orange or red quill would depend on the river: at Driffeld a red, on the Test, Itchen or Kennet an orange. In streams where you do not get much blue-winged olive, such as those of Dorsetshire or Derbyshire, my final selection, if all else failed, would be a ginger quill. I kill more fish nowadays on the ginger than on the red quill,

THE EVENING RISE

whatever may have been the case twenty years ago.

Hitherto, I have been talking of nights when the blue-winged olive alone comes down: but they are rare, for you usually find a mixed mass of pale watery and medium olive as well, and also their spinners, and perhaps that of the iron blue. You can tell if the trout are taking pale watery, for their rise to it is very different from the boil that they make at the blue-winged olive, and you can act accordingly. Again, you can sometimes tell when they are taking spinners, but in the dusk you cannot tell which. So you must try the sherry, yellow boy, houghton ruby and Lunn's particular, all of them. But often you are beaten, and then, as I say, at some time of the night, if nothing will induce them to rise, go back to one fly and stick to it. Carry an electric torch, and then you can change your pattern easily on the darkest night.

But here I must interpolate. On some evenings, and indeed some seasons, you get an early hatch of small sedges, and after them come the blue-winged olive and sherry spinner. The ordinary procession is reversed. Thus on the 14th and 15th July 1928 there was a hatch of small sedge early and a fall of sherry spinner after dark. On each night I killed on a sedge at about eight o'clock and then on a sherry spinner and 3x gut after eleven o'clock had struck.

But now for the sedge proper. When it gets too dark to see a No. 0 fly on the water, you can try a good sized sedge. It is little use before this, and little use after complete darkness. Do not

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

change to sedge too soon, and if your orange quill is killing well, stick to it. The time during which a sedge is taken rarely exceeds half an hour and is usually only a quarter. Of all fishing the sedge rise is the most uncertain. Not only may you have bad days, but bad years. I am not sure, too, whether success is caused by the presence of sedges themselves. Sometimes they are swarming in the reeds like bees and you cannot get a rise, while at others you may kill fish when there is not a natural fly to be seen: but you do not usually do much with the artificial until the time has come for the natural to hatch out, and it does not hatch in full force until July. A warm, windless night is almost essential. The easiest fish to catch is one lying close under the other bank, provided of course that it is within your reach. Get straight opposite him, and cast two feet above him. Be quite sure that you are reaching him; the tendency in the dusk is to cast short, particularly when you are throwing into the liquid reflection of the reeds. If he does not take, try this: when your fly is about to come over his nose, pull six or eight inches of line sharply through the rings with your spare hand: this has the effect of causing the fly to scutter over the water, and often makes the trout come at you with a glorious smashing rise like a sea trout. Pattern is not important, though size is. In the early part of the season do not go beyond No. 2: in July and August you can get up to No. 4 or 5. Always fish the sedge dry. I myself do not carry more than four patterns: small dark sedge, coachman, large hare's ear sedge, and cinnamon sedge. Of late I

THE EVENING RISE

have unconsciously dropped the silver sedge, which I used to use greatly: I killed on it the biggest trout I ever got on the dry fly, as will be told later.

Sedge fishing is not scientific, though a good man will always beat a bad one. But fish are often simple-minded, and anyone can catch them, those great cunning creatures which defied the most skilful in daylight. You catch trout by throwing across, or across and down, and either pulling the fly intentionally, or letting the stream cause it to drag. This, though it looks like clumsy fishing, actually reproduces most accurately the path of the natural sedge. But curiously enough it only answers at night, for never have I known shy fish take a dragging sedge by day. Some fishers despise the sedge: others regard it as the best part of a summer day. I express no opinion one way or another, but only mention three qualities which the sedge rise possesses. First, you may get hold of heavy fish quickly one after another, which is great fun. Second, you can redeem a bad day, and get even with those contemptuous, supercilious trout who have defeated you. Third, you have a chance of getting a real monster. On still summer nights, when not a leaf stirs, and in the pearly shadows you cannot see where the reeds end and their reflection begins, when the ghost moth is rising and falling over the damp meadow, and if you are lucky you may catch a glimpse of the graceful pink elephant hawk moth flying at the yellow iris flowers: when the great red sedge is flopping about in his feeble and aimless flight, and clouds of smaller sedges are flickering tirelessly up and down over

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

the unbroken surface, perchance some dim memory begins to stir in the slow mind of the old trout. All the season through he has fed at the bottom, grubbing on shrimps and caddis and water-snails and minnows and even on his own relatives. But he recalls seasons such as this, far back in former years, when all was quiet and warm and peaceful, when the fat sedges would tumble clumsily on to the water, and in their efforts to escape would make a ripple and commotion spreading far over the placid pool, and he remembers how fresh and fair they were to eat. Then he forsakes his lair under the arched willow roots and rises to the top and takes up his old station in the shadow of the tussock, where he used to lie long ago in his active middle age, when he weighed a bare two pounds. Aye, he weighs more than twice two pounds now, perhaps three times or more, he is the prize of a lifetime—and perhaps as your sedge comes over him you will see a break like that of a big raindrop, a little circle like the palm of a man's hand, and when you strike you will think you have hooked the trunk of a tree. That possibility always gives an excitement to sedge fishing. You are on the edge of the mysterious and the unknown, and you feel as you do when fishing a salmon river in which forty-pounders are not an impossibility.

For sedge fishing you must have a warm, still evening, and this is best for the small fly rise, too: but do not be driven home either by mist or cold or rain or wind. If it is cold and wet, spinners will not get on the water, what I call the casual rise will be blank, and you will do nothing till the

THE EVENING RISE

winged fly hatches; but there is often a good show of this on inclement, tempestuous nights. Do you recollect that typical summer evening, 14th June 1907? It was shiveringly cold, there was a wild wind and pelting showers. When I reached Winchester by the evening train, the weather looked so bad that I only went out because I was too restless to stay in: and yet I got a brace before being driven in to the fireside. Or the 13th June 1922, on the Kennet, a vile day which got viler, until the rain hammered down and the bitter wind blew in your teeth? Yet blue-winged olives hatched from eight to half-past nine and I landed ten takeable fish, of which I kept two brace. Or again, that other day in the same year, cold and wild and wet, 15th July 1922? There was a mighty hatch of the same fly just before dark, and I got six fish weighing nine pounds. Or the 23rd May 1924, wintry and wet, with half a gale? There was a splendid evening rise at Mottisfont right up to half-past nine. And perhaps the worst night I ever was out was 9th June 1928, at Stockbridge. So cold and wet was it, that two or three of us sat before the fire in the keeper's house debating whether we should go out. Yet there was a good hatch and we all got fish. I landed one of 3 lb. 7 oz. and broke in another which assuredly was bigger, on the sedge, too. No, never let weather keep you indoors, even on English summer nights. However, warm clear nights are of course the best. Black thunder clouds are very bad, in fact light is of great importance, and fish are often shyer on a cloudy than on a cloudless night. Fog is generally bad, but sometimes,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

if it is light and silvery, fly will hatch and trout will swallow them.

Many a bad day has the sedge redeemed. My most notable recollections of it, however, relate, not to the Test, but to the Kennet, which is the greatest of all sedge rivers. On 28th June 1914 a friend and I were fishing there. It was clear, summer weather, fair and hot, with an indeterminate breeze varying from south to west. Working hard till dark I got four fish of no great size, none of them on the sedge. Some time between nine and ten at night I reeled up and went in search of my friend. He had caught nothing till the last quarter of an hour; however, in that short space he had beaten my whole day's efforts, for he had taken four fish which weighed a great deal more than mine, all on the coachman. That is no unusual incident. On 26th July in the same year I toiled all day till tea-time for two fish which were only just over the pound limit, and at the small fly I failed to rise fish after fish: but in ten minutes with the coachman I rose all the six fish I tried for and got two brace. Again on 2nd August 1914, the last day's fishing before the war, I laboured unceasingly against a gusty wind for three fish, and once more made an utter mess of a hatch of blue-winged olives; whilst in the magic fifteen minutes during which trout take the sedge I landed four out of the six I found rising, and kept three which weighed only a fraction under six pounds. That year, 1914, was a good sedge year, and such years are scarce and should not be missed.

A moon behind your arm, especially a full moon, makes fish nearly impossible to approach. They

THE EVENING RISE

are put down far more easily than by the brightest sun. You may be rising trout regularly, when suddenly the first cast stops them, because the unnoticed moon has risen. It is an immense advantage to be ambidextrous, and fish underhand with the inshore hand.

Those who fish rivers where mayfly come will agree that, though with it you get a higher average weight, yet actually the biggest fish are killed on the sedge. In 1903 on the Kennet was a great mayfly season for heavy fish, and a friend of mine who had the Ramsbury water got the truly remarkable bag of six fish in one day which weighed over nineteen pounds: and yet the two heaviest fish of the year were got on the sedge. I got the heaviest. It was the 26th July 1903, a cloudy, gusty day, with a downstream wind, and I was on the water from eleven till five without seeing a rise. My friend and I then had tea and walked up the river at a quarter-past six. Olives began to appear and trout to move; and suddenly a really large one started rising. We stood and watched, with growing excitement. He was taking every fly, in solid and determined fashion, and the oftener he appeared the bigger he looked, and the faster beat our hearts. It was settled that I was to try for him. I was nervous and uncomfortable. He was very big: it was a long throw and the wind horrible: I could not reach him, and like a fool I got rattled and pulled off too much line: there was an agonized groan from my friend behind me when a great curl of it was slapped on the water exactly over the trout's nose. We looked at each other without speaking, and he silently

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

walked away up the river, leaving me staring stupidly at the spot where the trout had been rising. Of course he was gone.

The next two hours can be passed over. The small fly rise came and went. I caught a trout on a No. 2 silver sedge and finally, at about a quarter-past eight, found myself gazing gloomily at the place where I had bungled. The wild wind had blown itself out and had swept the sky bare of cloud. Silence had come, and stillness. The willows, which all through the long summer day had bowed and chattered in the wind, were straightened and motionless, each individual leaf hanging down as though carved in jade: the forest of great sedges, which the gusts had swept into wave after wave of a roaring sea of emerald, was now calm and level, each stalk standing straight and stiff as on a Japanese screen. There had occurred that transition, that transmutation from noise and movement to silence and peace, which would be more wonderful were we not so accustomed to it, when a windy summer day turns over to a moveless summer night: when the swing and clatter and rush of the day is arrested and lifted from the world, and you get the sense that the great hollow of the air is filled with stillness and quiet, as with a tangible presence. They are peaceful things, these summer evenings after wild days, and I remember particularly that this was one of the most peaceful; more so indeed than my thoughts, which were still in a turmoil. I stood watching mechanically, and then, tempting fate to help me, made a cast or two over the spot where the fish had been. How easy it was to reach

THE EVENING RISE

it now, how lightly my fly settled on the water, how gracefully it swung over the place. All to no purpose, of course, for nothing happened, and I was about to reel up when a fish rose ten yards above, close under my bank. It was one of those small movements, difficult to place. It might be a very large fish or a very small one. A wild thought swept through me that this was my big one: but no, I said to myself, it cannot be. This is not where he was rising. Besides, things do not happen like that, except in books: it is only in books that you make a fearful bungle and go back later and see a small break which you think is a dace, and cast carelessly and hook something the size of an autumn salmon: it is only in books that fate works in such fashion. Why, I know it all so well that I could write it out by heart, every move of it. But this is myself by a river, not reading in a chair. This is the real world, where such things do not happen: that is the rise of a half-pound trout.

I cast. I was looking right into the west, and the water was coloured like skim milk by reflection from where the sun had set. My silver sedge was as visible as by day. It floated down, there was a rise, I struck, and something rushed up stream. Then I knew.

Above me was open water for some twenty-five yards, and above that again a solid block of weed, stretching right across. My fish made for this, by short, irresistible runs. To let him get into it would have been folly: he must be stopped: either he is well hooked or lightly, the gut is either sound or rotten: kill or cure, he must be turned, if turned

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

he can be: so I pulled hard, and fortunately got his head round and led him down. He played deep and heavy and I had to handle him roughly, but I brought him down without a smash, and I began to breathe again. But then another terror appeared. At the place we had reached the only clear water was a channel under my bank, and the rest of the river was choked with weed. Should I try to pull him down this channel, about three or four yards wide, to the open water below? No. It was much too dangerous, for the fish was uncontrollable, and if he really wanted to get to weed he would either get there or break me: even with a beaten fish it would be extremely risky, and with an unbeaten one it was unthinkable. Well, if he would not come down he must go up, and up he went willingly enough, for when I released pressure he made a long rush up to the higher weed bed, whilst I ran up the meadow after him, and with even greater difficulty turned him once more. This time I thought he was really going right through it, so fast and so heavy was his pull, and I think he was making for a hatch hole above: but once more my gallant gut stood the strain and, resisting vigorously, he was led down. This proceeding was repeated either two or three times more, I forget which: either three or four times we fought up and down that twenty-five yards of water. By then he was tiring, and I took up my station in the middle of the stretch, where I hoped to bring him in: my hand was actually on the sling of the net when he suddenly awoke and rushed up. He reached the weed bed at a pace at which he was impossible to stop,

THE EVENING RISE

shot into it like a torpedo, and I had the sickening certainty that I should lose him after all. To hold him hard now would be to make a smash certain, so I slacked off: when he stopped I tightened again, expecting miserably to feel the dead, lifeless drag of a weeded line. Instead, to my delight, I found I was still in contact with the fish, and he was pulling hard. How he had carried the line through the weeds I do not know. To look at it seemed impossible: and if he had reached them earlier in the fight, when he played deep in the river, before he tired and the pressure brought him near the top, I should have been jammed hopelessly. But the line was clear, and the fish proved it by careering wildly on towards the hatch, making the reel sing. I believe he meant to go through into the carrier, as fish have done before and after, but I turned him. However, we could not stay where we were. The hatch was open at the bottom, there was a strong draw of water through it, and if a heavy, beaten fish got into this, no gut could hold him up. At all risks he must be taken back over the weed into the clear water. I pulled him up to the top and ran him down. Then, for the first time, after so many perils, came the conviction that I should land him. He was obviously big, but how big could not be known, for I had not had a clear sight of him yet. He still pulled with that immovable, quivering solidity only shown by a very heavy fish. But at last even his great strength tired. He gave a wobble or two, yielded, and suddenly he was splashing on the top, looking huge in the dusk. There ensued that agonizing time when you have a

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

big fish nearly beat, but he is too heavy to pull in, and nothing you can do gets him up to the net. At last I pulled him over it, but I lifted too soon, the ring caught him in the middle of the body, he wavered a moment in the air and then toppled back into the water with a sickening splash. A judgment, I thought, and for a shattering second I believed he had broken the gut, but he was still on. I was pretty well rattled by then and, in the half light, made two more bad shots, but the end came at last, he was in the net and on the bank.

How big was he? Three pounds? Yes, and more. Four pounds? Yes, and more. Five? He might be, he might. My knees shook and my fingers trembled as I got him on the hook of the steelyard. He weighed a fraction over 4 lb. 8 oz. I walked up to find my friend and asked him to weigh him, too. He made him a fraction under 4 lb. 9 oz. And that is my biggest fish on the floating fly.

CHAPTER XIV
THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS

Spring rides no horses down the hill,
But comes on foot, a goose-girl still.

The Goose-Girl.

By EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY. 1924.

MOUNTAINS HAVE NEVER HAD THE SAME ATTRACTION for me as plains or river valleys. These have a more enduring claim than the bolder appeal of rocks and snow. There is something about our downs, and still more about the prairie country of Saskatchewan or Wyoming, of Uruguay or Paraguay, which enters into my bones. Their broad, rolling surfaces, wind-swept and sun-soaked, under a wide sky, with an horizon which is always the same and always different, bring me down nearer to natural life and primitive ages than does the wildest and grandest of mountain scenery. And next after plains, and indeed in company with them, come river valleys. I never feel truly at home unless I am conscious of the valley in which I happen to be. For choice, I like to be able to see across it. If you are put down in the midlands of England or in other indeterminate country of that sort, can you say what valley you are in, without looking at a map? Very rarely can you: the

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

country seems, to one who reckons by valleys, to be without articulation or form. You should always be able to tell at a glance where you are. Whether you are in Wensleydale, Swaledale or Nidderdale should always be plain to you, and you should know instinctively without thinking whether the valley you are in is that of the Eden, the Irthing or the Caldew. You should always be able to say, That stream which I step across drains into the Test, and that high down which I see divides the Test from the Itchen. Indeed valleys are not only objects of natural beauty, but necessities, if you are to keep in tune with your surroundings. And there is another point. It is not only that the valley itself is pleasing, but the running water of the river gives it heart and life as a fire gives life to a room: and therefore you have both the attraction of moving water and also of its surrounding scenery. And further, if you follow the river and not the rail or the road, you will find that in its twists and its turns it is always showing you the distant view under another aspect, and you get a totally different idea of the country from that gained by one who scours the straight highway only. If also you go right down to the level of the water, as you do if you either fish or go in a boat, you step into a different plane of life. You see much that is hidden from him who only walks the banks—the habits of birds, and their nests, and flowers which before were unnoticed. You see all this life, not from above, but on an equality, as though you formed part of it. All these attributes are the peculiar advantages of river valleys. And they have the further merit that in

THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS

no other part of the earth can the changes of the seasons be observed better.

Hampshire combines both plains and rivers, and her downs and her trout streams can be seen in combination. The fisherman's season begins on 1st April. If the spring be such as that of 1924 there is very little change from winter. The broad meadows are still grey. The woods are bare of leaves. The row of beech trees at the top of the chalk cliff does not show a tinge of green, and you have to look close to see the buds on the hawthorn trees at its base. The reeds and sedges bordering the river, bleached by the winter rains, have a faded appearance, and the water, by contrast, looks dark and gloomy. The river runs full and fast and weedless, swirling down all its broad expanse. There are no flowers, for the kingcup, which ought to be in bloom everywhere, hardly shows its glossy leaves as yet, and even the blackthorn does not yet whiten the hedges. Nor have the spring birds arrived. True, snipe are drumming; lapwings, in search of nesting sites, are wheeling and crying; redshanks, wariest of birds, are so silent that they may have started laying, and pairs of sandpipers are resting on their way north: but there are no sedge or reed warblers, and neither chaff-chaff nor willow wren are to be heard. However, by every hatch or bridge is a couple of those birds which are almost, I think, my favourites, grey wagtails. Why they are called grey I cannot imagine. Apart from their backs, which are bluish rather than grey, it is the brilliant sulphur yellow of their underparts which gives them their character,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and anything less like so sober a word as grey cannot be imagined when you see these bright and glowing creatures either poised in the air or tripping delicately over a weed patch. A bird of the north and the west, yet they breed freely in Hampshire, and there were certainly six pairs at Mottisfont. And there are not many days on which you do not see the flashing blue of the kingfisher.

As the year runs on, and evenings grow longer and lighter and the sun gains in power, the valley wakes up. The first abundant flower of the Test is the kingcup. No plant possesses a better sense of arrangement, and its patches of gold are spread over the flat meadows more skilfully than the most cunning gardener could have planted them, with a luxuriant wastefulness as though to tell everyone that spring has really come. The grass, too, of these meadows begins to look less grey, and the band of hungry horses finds somewhat more to eat. And, when once the movement starts, everything comes with a rush. The willows grow green, and the fine black poplars which stud the valley show their bluish leaves. Weeds of all colours choke the river, and sedges begin to shoot up. This time, mid or late April, is one of the most attractive of the year. Trees are bursting into leaf, all their leaves are different in colour, and you do not get that somewhat heavy monotony which a wooded country presents in summer. And there is an air of expectancy and new birth over the landscape. The full glory of flowering bushes and trees has not come yet and the climax has not been reached: but, as it is always better to anticipate than to possess,

THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS

no season makes a deeper appeal to the imagination. It is a time of leaf more than of flower. The different tones of the different trees are seen at once and together. And remember that the green of leaves is never seen so well as by water, particularly by running water, for light is reflected at all angles off the glancing surface, making them delicate and translucent. Already, too, the spring birds will have come. The chiff-chaff's double call tells you that winter has really gone, the falling cadence of the willow wren strikes on the ear like dropping water, while the grasshopper warbler is trilling that endearing and reel-like note of his which ought to make him the patron-bird of anglers.

The next stage is when the flowering trees come out. Hawthorns love the chalk, and never do better than in Hampshire, gardens are gay with laburnum and lilac, and chestnuts blossom in the woods. In the meadows the kingcup is dying, but its place is taken by cowslips and dark orchis. There is no more beautiful combination of colour, and the yellow and the purple make an admirable contrast. And one by one the summer birds arrive. Yellow wagtails, yellow as canaries, trot on the bank; reeds and sedges are full of warblers; black-caps are singing and flycatchers busy on the fence posts. The climax of the year has come, bringing the wild rose, the yellow iris and the mayfly. The iris is another great Hampshire flower, and is everywhere in masses, arranged as though nature had gardened it. And the river now has its summer appearance. Patches of the white cups of the water crowfoot lie on the surface, many a hooked trout

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

takes refuge in one of those thick jungles which fishermen call celery beds, the water grows crystal-line, its surface flecked with wind-blown petals and pollen of the grass, trout come suddenly into sight, iron blues sail down in droves, and islands of dead weed form round the piers of bridges. The grass in the hayfields is growing long, large daisies appear in it, moths fly at night, and the hedges are starred with wild roses. The evening rise begins, red sedge flies blunder on to the surface, and you can fish till ten o'clock. Then June passes, birds have hatched their young, and family parties of linnets and goldfinches splash themselves at the shallow edge of the gravelly ford.

As the year runs on, and the hay is cut, the valley loses individuality. It remains beautiful, but less distinctive. There are no flowering trees, and the only bush is the guelder rose, not enough by itself, though graceful. I never see its ivory flowers without thinking of chalk streams. There is a pause in nature, until the late summer flowers come. And they do come, in quantities, and at no time are the banks so gay. Clusters of mimulus with its melted gold, thick spires of purple loosestrife, the homely comfrey, and a few tall columns of mullein make a brilliant garden: ditches are full of meadow-sweet and the air is heavy with its scent: patches of yellow ragwort cover the bottom of the down, and willow herb in the clearing of the wood is so thick that it looks like a pink mist. Some of these flowers last all through the hot days of July and August, until the turn of the year. Then we slip into autumn, catch perhaps a few fish in September,

THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS

linger as long as we can, and finally say good-bye to the valley until next April.

But, before you go, do not forget to pay a tribute to the loveliest of all Test flowers, the loveliest and the rarest, the balsam. It is unmistakable, with its olive-dark leaves and its red and orange blossoms, looking remote and exotic, more in keeping with an equatorial forest than our keen and strenuous air. It is not in full bloom till September. It is a wayward creature, because in some years it disappears entirely and in others it is difficult to find. But when it is plentiful it is one of the great sights afforded by English flowers. There are few places in these islands where it grows at all, and there can be still fewer where it blossoms so luxuriantly as on the Test.

But, you may ask, what is there here distinctive of Hampshire? Spring comes everywhere, cowslips grow in many meadows, all rivers have running water, and sedge warblers are not found only on the Test. What is it that gives chalk streams their particular character? The answer to that question is not easy. It depends on atmosphere and tone and contour and association and other imponderable factors. But certain qualities can be distinguished. The bold yet smooth outlines of the down make an agreeable background. Occasionally, too, the side of a hill has been broken into, either by nature or man, and the result is fine cliffs of dazzling chalk. Downs also have their individual beauties. The short, sweet grass, with its wealth of flowers, gives them a special character all through the seasons. And the chalk soil which produces

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

this vegetation gives to the air a limpidity and nimbleness which you do not get on the heavy clays of which much of the south of England is composed. But these light soils have this disadvantage, that they become dry in hot summers. Rain soaks through them, it does not remain to feed the surface, and the down turns a dull, faded yellow. But where you have rivers running through the chalk you avoid this drawback, for they keep the meadows as luxuriant as in spring. And chalk rivers have a pleasing habit peculiar to themselves, of splitting themselves up into many channels, some deep and slow, others shallow and rapid, as though anxious to spread their gift of water over as wide an area as possible. And this natural feature has been increased by the work of man, who by his system of irrigation has carried the boon far and wide. Therefore when the rest of the world grows dry and dusty, Hampshire valleys keep green and cool, there is movement of water everywhere during the somewhat stagnant period of late summer, and the river meadows have features which other fields lack. Fed by the winter water, they have thick crops in April, whilst other fields are still bare. Unfortunately, at Mottisfont the old irrigation system is falling into disuse and many tracts which are still ridged and channelled for the purpose are no longer flooded. But above Mottisfont, between it and Stockbridge, there are still many fine expanses. Here the sheep are penned down in April, and when they have nibbled the field bare and brown, water is run in again and hay is cut in June.

THE PAGEANT OF THE SEASONS

Hampshire is a wooded country and the combination of wood and stream increases the attractions of each. In the level parts all forest trees grow, and grow well: but the down has its own attributes, juniper bushes, beeches and yews. All these, like the hawthorn, are chalk lovers. In early spring, when the long line of beeches is a vivid green, the black yews stand out against them solid and heavy: and grass never looks so fresh as in some quiet hollow of the down which is studded with dark junipers. All these features, wood and water, downland and meadow, forest and flowers, are found in the valley of the Test: some characteristics are peculiar to it, but many are common to all southern England. It is their mixture, their blending, the proportion of each to the whole, which give the valley its enduring beauty.

CHAPTER XV
THE HARVEST MOON

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;

And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Silver. By WALTER DE LA MARE.

I HAD ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT CHALK-STREAM TROUT did not rise at night. You can catch them after dark, of course, and many of them: but this is merely the prolongation of the evening rise, not a night rise proper, which is a distinct event, starting later, above all starting after an interval, usually of one or two hours. I was quite certain that, the evening rise once ended, trout did not begin again, and that you did not get in Hampshire that second movement which takes place on some waters, where, in the opal dusk of a northern summer, you can fish from midnight till dawn. And of all evenings I should have considered one with a full moon the very worst. A full moon behind your arm was fatal as I had often proved, and even in front of you was bad. Trout are far more shy by moonlight than by sunlight. From this I concluded that there

THE HARVEST MOON

was no real moonlight rise on the Test. Thus I committed that facile mistake, generalizing from knowledge which though true was incomplete. Moreover, you should not generalize about fishing, which admits not of generalization. I was to learn something that evening of which I was ignorant before, for all my angling years.

As we walked to the river, the fisherman and I, in the chill September twilight, I asked the usual question about the prospect of sport. He answered that I should be lucky to catch anything at the ordinary evening rise, but that if I liked to stay out till ten o'clock, I was sure to do well. Then, after a pause, he added: It's full moon to-night, harvest moon.

For a moment, the force of his words did not penetrate. It is such a commonplace among Hampshire fishermen that there is no night fishing, and that a full moon is much worse than a cloudless sun, that my brain refused to accept them. But, when I had recovered, the old fisherman quietly told me that once a year, at full moon of the harvest moon, trout would rise, though no other moon suited them equally well. I was silent, too astonished to enquire further.

As predicted, nothing happened during the first hour. One or two fish moved in that languid and spasmodic manner which they adopt when they do not intend to be caught. Then they stopped altogether, and I reeled up and waited for the moon. The sky cleared, it got colder and there was a light draught of air from the north. At last a glow in the east announced the rising of the moon, and

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

she swung up over the dark wood, silvering all the world. We had been on the east bank, looking into such light as remained from where the sun had set: we now crossed over, so as to fish right into the moonlight. The river was broad, twenty to thirty yards, flowing at a sharp even pace, its surface luminous like quicksilver. I waited, still sceptical, but well content to watch the pure, cold beauty of the autumn night. But not for long did I wait. Suddenly a trout rose in midstream, and the waves of his rise, widening over the river and catching the moonlight as they moved, were made visible as by day, turning the surface into a mass of shivering spangles. I cast over him, hooked him, he plunged across the stream and got off. Another fish moved right under the far bank. It was a long cast even by daylight, and I was doubtful whether I could reach him, for a long throw requires accurate timing, and it is hard to judge rightly when you cannot see your line. But there was no difficulty. Throwing over twenty yards, I could yet plainly see my gut before it fell on the water, glistening like the scale of a herring, with iridescent drops streaming from it: aye, and I could see my fly too, floating gaily on the surface. It was no doubt a big one, a hackle sedge: but it was twenty-five yards off, and yet there it was, plain and obvious. For some time the trout went on rising, keeping the surface all in a quiver of pearly light but disregarding my fly, so I changed to a cinnamon sedge, a size bigger. This he had at once, with a mighty wallop, and was soon in the net. Trout never fight hard at night, and very rarely go to weed. He weighed 2 lb. exactly.

THE HARVEST MOON

As the moon rose higher the night became clearer and colder. We walked slowly upstream. In a stretch shaded by heavy trees a trout splashed, and I peered into the wall of darkness to find him. At first, turning from the white moonlight into the dark obscurity of the trees, I could see nothing. But after a time the shadow became liquid, the darkness was made visible, and I could make out a faint movement on the black velvet of the water. I cast, but in the inky shadow it was impossible to see whether the fly went right. The wind, too, began to blow more strongly, straight downstream. At last the fish appeared to come at me, but only half-heartedly; he was not hooked, and stopped rising. We moved up higher still. Here the prospect widened, opening out into a broad stretch of level land, with the tiled roofs of the village and the slate steeple of the church on the one hand and a tall oblong mill on the other. The valley lay silent and still under the dominance of the moon, and river and reeds, meadows and distant woods were drenched in her clean and lucid light. So cold and hard was this light, so different was the atmosphere from the gracious warmth of a summer dusk, that a rise seemed unthinkable. Yet it was not so. Two or three trout were moving regularly, making ripples of silver phosphorescence. One of them, lying in midstream, took my sedge quietly and well, but, struck too soon, was missed, and flounced off with a splash. The next was almost touching the opposite bank, another long cast, and in a channel surrounded by weeds. After some failures—it was a narrow target—he was hooked, and hauled

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

successfully over the weeds, protesting vigorously, into the clear water, but there he too came off.

By then it was past ten o'clock, our fingers were cold, and as the trout appeared to have retired to the bottom, we also went home to a fireside. I had only caught one, but I had had a chance of five. Above all, I had gained an experience.

CHAPTER XVI

TWO DAYS

The years will bring their anodyne,
But I shall never quite forget
The fish that I had counted mine
And lost before they reached the net.

The Devout Angler.

By COLLIN D. B. ELLIS. 1930.

THE TWO DAYS FOLLOWED EACH OTHER, IN THE LAST week of a recent July. It is not my intention to write much about the first. It looked unpromising; one of those days of west wind and heavy clouds, beloved of our ancestors, but possibly the worst you can have for the dry fly. The wind blew hard all day: a wind which felt like a solid movement of air, the strength of which you do not realize until you have to cast against it. It was downstream, and scarcely dropped at night. The clouds were massive and low, as though sitting on the top of your head. But in spite of all I did well; for not only did I get five fish which averaged over two pounds, but nearly everything fished for was landed. All went right; low water, drag, weeds, and wind, none presented any difficulties; and I returned home with that air of smug reticence and specious modesty which we all carry when we have been more prosperous than our friends. But I am not going to dwell

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

on that day. Nothing is so tiresome as a fisherman's monotonous recital of his unvaried successes, and it becomes unbearable when the narrator adds to it a long and meticulous description of the difficulties which he alone was competent to overcome.

The next day broke better. The wind was still downstream, it is true, and strong. But the sky was blue and silver, the air incredibly clear, and the river valley looked as though it had been newly painted green. I started to walk up about ten o'clock, confident of a good day. In the second meadow above the house a fish was feeding. It is a deep, steady-flowing bit of the river, a notable harbour for good trout, but a bad rising place. However, there he was, rising regularly, at something not distinguishable. I put on my smallest hackle olive quill. He took it at once, sailed about for a bit, and then darted through two beds of weeds, jumped twice, and plunged head downwards into a third. By great good fortune I managed to get my line so nearly clear that the fish could be felt once more. I was congratulating myself prematurely, when I was clumsy and the fly came back.

For some time after that nothing happened. One fish, in the swirl behind a weed patch, rose now and then, taking something invisible. I tried five or six flies over him without the least effect, and then, as he was not big, left him. About noon a few pale wateries came down and continued for an hour or two, but the fish never paid much attention, so I continued my stroll up. At the top, below the corner of a bridge, exactly where I had killed a fish of 2 lb. 2 oz. on the first day, lay a big one. It is

TWO DAYS

always a favourite harbour for fish. They lie close up to the brickwork, in a little backwater no bigger than a horse trough. It is a charming apartment, fitted with all modern conveniences. Underneath there is golden gravel, and overhead hang the vivid leaves of a plane tree. On one side is the bank and the tree; on the other a strong swirling pool of unknown depth. At the throat of the backwater there enters a delicate stream, not eight inches wide, which not only keeps the whole habitation aerated and healthy, but brings an unfailing supply of food, floating or submerged. Everything in the neighbourhood has to come that way. In May, when the olives are so thick that they almost touch one another, they get carried in fleets into a big whirlpool. They may be blown this way or that by the gusts, and round and round they may sail in circle after circle, but in the end they are all floated into the backwater through that narrow gateway. And when you add to these advantages the fact that a fisherman must approach quite close and in full view, and that a single wag of the trout's tail will take him into the pool's recesses, you have a dwelling fitted for the most crafty and fastidious. Moreover, you have to fish from the bridge, more a dap than a cast, and when you hook him you have to seize your chance whilst he lunges round the pool below, and clamber down a steep and insecure ladder in order to get on terms with him. Altogether the fish there are long lived. I had killed one yesterday. To-day, though approached with the same care, he saw me at once and disappeared.

At the far side of the pool the heavy stream

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

swings against the bank and undercuts it. Here there is a deep hole, filled with submerged willows and alders. From thence the current rebounds almost at right angles and makes a long rippling run round the bend of the bank. In this run fish often lie, and if they lie they take, whether rising or not. This is usually the case when, as here, the stream is very shallow and a long way from cover. They only go to so insecure a spot when hungry. You have to get into the water to see if any fish are there: for on the bank is a broad belt of high reeds over which you cannot look. So I stumbled and splashed through this, delighted when my feet felt the hard gravel of the shallow. After a glance round I began cautiously moving up, one foot at a time, uncovering the stream yard by yard round the curve of the bank as I advanced. I soon saw a fish. I stepped out into the stream so as to clear the reeds in casting, and thereby brought into view another fish, closer in, lower down, and bigger. Much bigger. I can see him yet. He took my variant; and, without a pause, dashed up towards the sullen hole full of branches and roots of alder and willow. The experienced reader, well read in angling books, will know what is coming next. He will know that I did one of two things: I either held the fish hard, or else I slacked off altogether, whereupon he stopped. Whichever I did, I killed him. As a matter of fact, I did neither. Everything went from me except a vague idea that you ought not to hold big fish too roughly. In a flash he was in a tangle of boughs and roots. My 3x gut was gallant stuff, and for an appreciable time he walloped about,

TWO DAYS

securely anchored. I had a wild hope that I might clear. But he cleared first.

Somewhat humiliated, I made a circuit, and struck the river lower down. Above was a broad, deep pool, famed for heavy fish. At this time it was more weed than water; for the cut weeds from above had floated down and entangled themselves with the growing ones, forming solid continents, over which wagtails trotted and rats nibbled. Between these continents ran narrow roadways of water, and in one a trout was rising quietly. Exactly there I had killed one yesterday, nearly two pounds and a half. I stopped eating my sandwiches.

Fish rising in such places are peculiarly attractive. True, if hooked they usually weed you; and a fish is far harder to extract from dead vegetation than from living. True also that, if you get hung up and shake the weeds, you will put the fish down. On the other hand, the dense forest acts as a dam and forces the water more swiftly through the open channels, and therefore your fly comes quicker over the fish. Moreover, trout in such positions are usually big, often very big; they rise confidently; and they are less particular, and will at times take almost anything floated properly down the narrow pathway of their vision.

So it happened. He took the variant first cast. He shot through an almost solid mass of vegetation, and then surged up to the top to take a look at things. Down he went again, and whizzed like a torpedo through fully ten yards more of underwater jungle, and then rolled up again.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

At this point, for the second time, the crafty reader knows what is to follow. I shall drop the point of my rod, and pull line off the reel. When the fish stops, I shall unhurriedly clear my line of floating weeds, hand-line him out, and net him. Did I do this? Did I drop my point and slacken off? I did not. On the contrary, I held hard, rod well up, my eyes goggling stupidly at the fish on his visits to the top. The result need not be stated. Once again my 3x gut proved itself stout; but the smash, of course, came.

As I was cursing myself, a curious thing happened. A fish rose in the exact place where the hooked one had been. So quickly was his place taken that I had only just reeled in. A wild idea passed through the mind that the first fish had had the chivalry to force his way back through fifteen yards of tropical jungle, and had advertised his re-appearance in order to give a bungler another chance. Such tricks does a heated imagination play to one who is thoroughly rattled. When he rose again, however, it was plain that the newcomer was much smaller, and that the incident was only one of the many instances of a vacant place being re-occupied immediately. I caught him. He weighed 1 lb. 10 oz. Taking him as a measure, I believe I know what the last one weighed. We always do know. But I shall not tell.

It was now three o'clock on as fair a summer day as you could wish to see. The river had the typical July appearance, for it had lost the freshness of early June, but still showed that calm serenity which lasts until the decline into autumn sets in. The morning

TWO DAYS

rise, such as it had been, was over. On days like this of settled fine weather, when the morning hatch is light, there is often a good one between three and five in the afternoon. There might be such to-day. On the other hand, the sky had cleared and the wind dropped; therefore there was every prospect of an evening rise. No human being can fish effectively for twelve hours on end, and it was obviously wiser to go home, have a cup of tea and an early dinner, and fish the evening out.

It was eight o'clock, summer time, before I was on the water again. Just above the mill a weed-rack had caught up and detained a broad patch of floating weed, sticks and rubbish; and above the patch a band of scum two or three feet wide had formed, as often happens. There is nearly always a fish just above the scum. It is a good place; for if disturbed he only has to sink into the deep hole below the weeds; whilst his wants are well supplied, for all flies brought down by the current are entangled in the scum and kept in a natural larder until it pleases him to sail about and eat them dispassionately one by one. On this evening the tenant was taking spinners with the mature deliberation which befitted his portliness. He took mine as though he had been waiting all day for it. Then he made a long run upstream and came off.

Higher up, but still within reach, close under the left bank as you looked upstream, another fish was doing the same. And he also took my spinner. He was sluggish and solid and heaved himself into an underwater forest, boring relentlessly further and further in. I hand-lined him, and got him nearly

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

out. Then I held him a fraction too hard, and the gut broke.

The evening rise proper did not start till nine, and lasted exactly a quarter of an hour. There was one of those wild hatches of blue-winged olives which drive fish and fisherman equally frantic. It began so suddenly that it happened whilst I was getting over a stile. On the near side of it I stood a few minutes and watched the quiet water: when I had crossed and looked up, the river was boiling. In a sense I was prepared, for I had on a No. 1 orange quill. There were so many rising and so close together that, in the opal dusk, it was difficult to tell a big fish from a little, and impossible to prevent your fly coming over more than one at a cast. In that furious fifteen minutes I landed three which were just undersized, and pricked hard another which felt heavier. Then all was over, and silence and stillness fell once more on the valley. It got darker, too dark to see a small fly on the water. I put on a large coachman and waited. But I waited in vain.

So ended the second day. The two days had only one point in common. On both big fish rose, and rose well. Otherwise they were as different as days could be. The first was heavy and oppressive, with a dull light which took all the colour out of trees and grass, and with a solid wind moving remorselessly against you, making casting a penance. The sky was different tones of unwholesome lead colour. The second was clear and beautiful, with a wind which had wings to it, giving that clean feeling to the air which anglers know so well, and bringing

T W O D A Y S

out all the depth of the varied greens which clothe the valley. Both days provided about the same number of chances. The first resulted in five heavy fish, and the second in one middle-sized one. And yet the second was an infinitely better fishing day than the first. What was the reason of the difference? Was it luck? Partly, perhaps; but only partly. The difference really sprang from another cause. It was due to touch, or hands, or eye, or whatever you like to call that mental alertness and equipoise which brings success in sport or games. I was not conscious of fishing badly: but it was clearly a case of that imponderable factor which makes you hit driven grouse one day, and miss them the next. It governs our fishing to an extent greater than we realize; the harder the test the more dominant it becomes: and we are too apt to lay to the charge of fate disasters for which we alone are to blame.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE

The most beautiful of all Ephemerals

Description of the blue-winged olive.

By ALFRED RONALDS

THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE, BOTH AS A DUN AND IN ITS metamorphosis, the sherry spinner, is the mainstay of evening fishing. On chalk streams of the south, it appears mainly in the summer and mainly in the evening: at Driffield it is a spring fly and a day fly. In the south the orange quill is its best imitation: at Driffield the orange quill is useless. At Driffield the coot-winged copy kills well, but on the Test I can do nothing with it. Whether these facts are interconnected, I do not know.

The insect was not differentiated till recently. Ronalds knew it not until his fifth edition came out. This was edited in 1856 by Barnard Smith, under the pseudonym of Piscator, Barnard Smith being famous as the author of an arithmetic, the nightmare of the schooldays of one who could never add up. Barnard Smith does not figure or describe it, but mentions its existence in a note to the turkey brown. He says that on some waters a fly is found very like the turkey brown, except that its wings "partake of the colour of the iron blue." I think this must

THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE

be the blue-winged olive, for size and colour are right, and both flies are set apart by being the only ones of their size which have three setæ.

The first dressing was given by Aldam twenty years later, his famous indian yellow. This pattern has dropped out, largely I believe because shop-tied ones are much too light in the wing. The feather, too, is difficult to get, for it must come from the under covert of a young grouse, killed not later than 1st September. Those from old birds are useless. The actual feather is contained in Aldam's book, and is a brownish grey; possibly some could be found with a bluish tinge, nearer in tint to the natural insect. Anyhow, the pattern is worth resuscitating. By the way, Aldam says that the natural fly appears from May onwards, as it does in the north, and that the natural insect was first brought to his notice by James Smith, of Sharrow near Sheffield, more than thirty-five years earlier. That would be the year 1841.

I do not know who first named the fly. Both insect and name were unknown to Francis Francis in 1867, but known to Halford in 1886, who dressed the pattern with a coot's wing. On chalk streams of the south, the orange quill is used almost universally, and this discovery, made by Mr. Skues in the nineties, has turned a hatch of blue-winged olive, formerly an event always incalculable, and often baffling, into a most lucrative one.

The fly comes up very late, frequently after dark, and this makes it difficult to be certain in what form fish are eating it, as nymph or subimago or spinner. No doubt when the fish swallow the newly hatched

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

insect they do so with the resounding thump that fishermen know so well, but as it drifts down in ever greater masses, trout get more confident and more quiet. Moreover, it is wonderfully hard to tell when they are after the nymph. And on this there is more to be said.

I am convinced we do not fish the nymph enough, at least I am sure I do not. I shall give two patterns, the first of which kills either floating or awash or under water, and the second sunk. The first is the hackle blue-wing, with a body of swan's fibre dyed yellow and a blue dun hackle. Do not oil it. Trout usually take it half sunk, when it imitates the fly hatching out. If it is refused, let it sink completely. Often it does very well; but, if it is declined, do not stick to it, for when it is neglected it is neglected entirely. In this it is unlike the orange quill, which kills after many failures. So much for one pattern. The next is a dressing of the nymph, which I owe to Mr. Skues; it should always be sunk. Its body is made of cowhair the colour of dried blood, tied with hot orange silk, the hackle is dark blue hen, and the hook a No. 2, with a round bend. I have only just tried it, but I fancy it will do great things.

However, though these artificials are useful, by far the most of your trout will be taken either on an orange quill or on a sherry spinner. The orange quill is a really great fly. If you exclude mayfly and sedge, it accounts for more than one tenth of the trout I catch. And most of those are got on the larger sizes, No. 1, or even No. 2. Very often I fish it till dark, not changing to a sedge.

THE BLUE-WINGED OLIVE

The sherry spinner, also, is quite indispensable. Trout, when on it, disregard everything else. There are many dressings, and you will please yourself: but I do best with those whose body is of a full orange colour.

So much for the blue-winged olive. It is still plentiful on Test or Kennet, and I trust will long remain so.

CHAPTER XVIII
STOCKBRIDGE

Morton, how foolish was this silly trowte,
Which quickly sawe, and pertly plaide about
The little flye, of bigness of a pinn.
But oversawe the fisher and his ginn.

So men doe oft which greedy are of gaine.

Eyde to their profit, but blinde to their paine.

Chrestoleros. By THOMAS BASTARD. 1598.

(Epigram 28, "Ad Georgium Morton")

STOCKBRIDGE IS THE MOST FAMOUS OF THE WORLD'S fisheries. Its repute rests on its portly and perspicacious trout, which have fatter bodies, and cooler heads than any other known fish: on its lovely succession of deeps and shallows, racing rapids and swinging stretches, all as though arranged to give the dry fly man every variety of shot: and on the art with which nature has been assisted and seconded in this fine fishery. I do not intend to give that dullest thing in the world, a description of the water, meaningless to those who have not seen it, and inadequate to those who have. The very names of the different reaches seem to tell their own story. They have a classical ring about them: Sheepbridge, Machine Shallow, the Black Lake, Park Stream, North Head—is it fancy which makes me think that such words would convey an essence

STOCKBRIDGE



STOCKBRIDGE

of sport, even to one who cared nothing for fishing? Surely not: they stir the heart, just as whether we know them or not, and whether they denote our special pursuit or one of which we think little, we cannot hear unmoved such names as Belvoir or the Black Mount or Cloutsham or Sprouston Dub or Broomhead. Nor do I intend to give an account of the fishing. That would require a book by itself. I only want to say something about the care of water and something about flies artificial and natural.

Stockbridge is the home of scientific management. The water has been cared for in every way. The growth of good weed has been encouraged, weed which harbours larvæ and shrimps, and evil growths, such as the American weed, *elodea canadensis*, are eradicated. This is the vermin of weeds, an unwholesome dull green in colour, thick and glutinous

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

in texture. It is all faults and no merits. It houses no nymphs. Shrimps avoid it, and, upon my word, I believe trout dislike it, too. It defeats and expels the virtuous weed. Above all, it collects mud, which chokes up the gravel and soon ruins the finest spawning beds. You can see the process at work. It should be taken out remorselessly, and the mud with it.

The treatment of mud is a difficult question. A stream requires some mud: the nymph of the may-fly, for example, lives in it: but there is no doubt that chalk streams are muddier than they ought to be and than nature intended. This may be due partly to mills, and to weirs built ages ago for irrigation purposes, but these causes are of long standing and are not the reason of recent deterioration. This is produced by two factors. The first is the depletion of the springs in order to supply towns with water. This, a growing evil, lessens the flow and prevents winter floods from scouring the gravel clean. And the second is the creation by fishermen of dams designed to steady the run of the stream and to deepen it. These also cause mud to collect: indeed, I know one magnificent stretch of chalk stream in process of being ruined by this mistake. Occasional muddy reaches do no harm to trout: much of the slow-flowing Kennet is muddy, yet nowhere are there brighter fish: but trout require sharp, clean gravel and white chalk as well, and where mud is excessive they become lanky, dark and ill-favoured. And above all they can only spawn on gravel through which water can percolate. As soon as mud settles on gravel, weeds follow; they in turn

STOCKBRIDGE

collect more mud, which clamps the whole into an impervious block of evil-smelling deposit, penetrating the gravel and solidifying it as though with a slimy mortar. Such mud has to be taken out, but even so the same causes will reproduce it and it remains a problem. Perhaps it might be possible to narrow the stream in some place, and increase the scour. Anyhow you can get rid of American weed. At Stockbridge artificial spawning beds of free gravel have been made.

In an earlier chapter I have given the history of the mayfly at Stockbridge. At the present time the hatch is enormous; efforts were made in previous years, when the fly was disappearing, to bring it back, and it was imported, at the end of last century, both from the tributary Dun and also from the Kennet: but this seems to have had no effect, for Stockbridge did no more than share the increase which came somewhere about 1920, and affected all rivers equally, whether restocked or not. I know of no case where you can say for certain that reintroduction of a vanished fly has succeeded. At this moment the grannom, another great Stockbridge fly, is perhaps increasing. It has been reintroduced; but whether this is the reason of the increase, I doubt. My own belief is that nature will not allow us to usurp her function. We can destroy, as tar poison shows, but we cannot create. The *Chronicles of the Houghton Club* prove that the grannom, like the mayfly, follows curves of growth and dearth for which we know no reason, and the best we can do is not to get in nature's way.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

At Stockbridge, indeed, care of flies has gone as far as care of fish. Apart from mayfly and grannom, a successful plan has been found to increase the produce of certain smaller flies. The discovery, due to the genius of William Lunn, is of extraordinary interest. Ephemerid flies which lay their eggs in water either drop them from above, as does the sherry spinner, or flutter over the water, occasionally touching the surface and allowing eggs to be washed off, as the mayfly does, or they go down themselves under water to lay them. To do this the female encloses a bubble of air by folding her wings over her back and crawls down a post into the water and deposits her eggs on the post. When she has finished, the air bubble acts as a float and brings her to the top. Now William Lunn discovered that many of such eggs were eaten by caddis, for these intelligent insects climbed up the posts when egg-laying was to be expected, and breakfasted off a natural omelette. In some cases every egg was devoured. In order to defeat their ravages, he hit upon the idea of tethering floating boards to the posts of bridges. He hoped that the fly would go down and lay her eggs on the under sides, where they would be safe, caddis being unable to swim. The success of the plan was remarkable and immediate. In a short time, the under surfaces of these boards were found to be covered with eggs. From this invention flies of the kind which use this means of breeding have undoubtedly increased at Stockbridge. There is no doubt about this. Moreover, the boards can be moved when full of eggs, and refixed at the top of some reach where fly is

STOCKBRIDGE

wanting, and thus repopulate it. This is being done. And also boards covered with eggs are now being exchanged with different rivers. Packed in damp moss, the eggs come to no harm and hatch out in due time. It remains to be seen whether an insect unknown on a river can be introduced by this plan, but at any rate stock is changed and fishing must benefit thereby.

Artificial breeding of trout, and artificial stocking of the water, are universal on the Test. Perhaps they are unavoidable; anyhow, they are too firmly seated to be affected by criticism. At Stockbridge trout are hatched from Test parents, and reared in carriers running parallel to, and only a few yards off, the main stream, and therefore pass their early life under the same conditions, except for hand feeding, as their later years. Restocking consequently is carried out under circumstances far more favourable than in cases where trout of alien race, bred in foreign surroundings, are brought from a distance. Stockbridge trout still are fat and crafty and, after a short time in the river I am not sure that the hand-reared are not craftier than the wild. But, though Hampshire fishers will mock at the idea, I am a sceptic about restocking in the upper waters of the Test. In the lower or middle reaches, I do not think it can be dispensed with. And once it has been started I agree that it is difficult to stop: but, did I own a stretch of the upper river, I should be tempted to try doing without it. Wild-bred trout are a hardier race, and the pursuit of them makes a stronger appeal to the imagination. Anyhow, no one wants to rear by hand unless he is obliged to,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and it would be amusing to try. On the upper Test (it is not true of the middle or lower) more fish were caught in the old days, year after year, without a single one being turned in: more attention is paid to scientific weed cutting than used to be the case: coarse fish are killed down more ruthlessly: why cannot the water restock itself as it did formerly? I feel that there is a case for enquiry, at any rate, about all this restocking, in waters well provided with spawning grounds. I can prove nothing: it is an instinct more than a belief with me: but I will give two interesting histories. Mr. Plunket Greene, whom the world knows as a singer and his friends as a fisherman too, has written¹ an account of the Bourne, in which he attributes the deterioration of that lovely stream to restocking in 1904 and subsequent years, in that case, no doubt, overstocking. In his opinion this little river, which formerly held two-pounders in plenty and an occasional three-pounder, will never be the same again. That is one instance. My other, more exact and detailed, is from the Kennet. Halford and some friends took the Ramsbury water in 1893, and proceeded to develop it on scientific lines. Coarse fish were killed: yearlings and two-year-olds, chiefly barbarians from High Wycombe, were poured in by the bucketful: everything was done to improve the river: and yet the fishing, which had been good before restocking in 1893, had got so bad by 1896 that the tenants threw it up in disgust. Now mark what followed. The water was rented by a friend

¹ *Where the Bright Waters Meet.* By H. Plunket Greene. 1924.

STOCKBRIDGE

of mine from 1899 till 1913, and by my brother from then till his death in 1922. During these twenty-three years never a trout was turned into it, and at the end the fishing was better than ever. The annual bag varied, of course, but on the whole got bigger, and in 1922 the river was packed with good fish. It was rare to find a black one, or one out of condition. When the mayfly left the water—it began to decrease in 1907 and did not return in force till 1922—fewer three-pounders were killed, but the average weight was not diminished.

Now this particular water is well off for spawning beds. But so is much of the Test also: indeed, most of the upper Test is better furnished than the Kennet, a slower, deeper and muddier river. When you reach the middle Test, stocking has provided us with bigger catches and better sport. But in the upper, sport has deteriorated, and this has happened since artificial breeding became universal. I do not want to dogmatize. Other factors may have been at work at Ramsbury and on the Bourne: but, at the least, the case is one for reflection and examination. And there I will leave it.

Perhaps the most interesting development, the greatest contribution the Houghton Club are making to the art, is in the study of dressings of flies. This has been carried to a high pitch, and developed on original lines. The Houghton Club, fortunate in all things, are not least to be envied in the help they have had from William Lunn, keeper and manager of the water. This remarkable man has devoted his life to a study of trout and their food, and his long experience, his acute observation, his broad

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

and sane outlook, and above all his quick and original mind, make his conclusions of great interest and value. But before describing them, may I be allowed a digression, in order to say something of the previous history of knowledge of flies and their imitation?

Modern practice is associated with two names: Ronalds, the English fisherman, and Pictet, the Swiss entomologist. Much, of course, had happened before, as I have tried to show elsewhere; but natural history and fishing were not wedded to one another before Ronalds' day. His *Fly-Fisher's Entomology* was published in 1836, Pictet's work on the *phryganidæ* or sedges in 1834, and on the *neuroptera*, which included the *ephemeridæ*, in 1842-1845. Ronalds therefore wrote before Pictet's book on the ephemerids had appeared, and probably he had not seen his earlier one on the sedges. But Pictet's wonderful books soon became known, giving the fisherman something he had not had before: and, though it is to Ronalds that the angler-naturalist owes his birth, some of the credit must be given to Pictet. Strangely enough, eighty-five years were to pass before Ronalds was superseded. In those years natural history made immense advances: fishing also did not stand still: but no one brought the two together, no one gave the fisherman another book he could use both at home and at the water-side, until Mr. Martin Mosely published his *Dry-fly Fisherman's Entomology* in 1921, exactly eighty-five years later. I am not overlooking what happened in the interval. Theakston Jackson, Kingsley, Hamilton, Mr. Leonard West, and others

STOCKBRIDGE

contributed, and Halford wrote *Dry-fly Entomology*. It were ungenerous to criticize one to whom we all owe so much, and who is dead: but I think fishermen will agree that that book is not the most valuable part of the legacy which Halford bequeathed. No, Ronalds was not replaced until Mr. Martin Mosely wrote: his contribution is a great one, and marks an epoch in fishing. Now, though Mr. Martin Mosely's book does not describe artificial flies, I believe it will give to their dressing as great a stimulus as Ronalds gave. At any rate fly tying is passing through a period of change, and is developing on new lines. This is best shown by comparing present patterns with those used a few years back. In 1910 Halford, at the end of his life, published his final dressings, which he believed to be unsurpassable. There are thirty-three of them, and, leaving out his eleven spent spinners, all his flies are of the old winged type. Think of it: not one single blue upright or hackled olive or badger smut: not one hackled mayfly or sedge and not a tup or a pheasant tail. But see what happened a short time afterwards. Two years later Mr. Leonard West's *Natural Trout Fly* gave one hundred and eighteen dressings of one hundred and two insects: sixty-nine of these dressings are winged, forty-nine hackled: therefore about five out of every twelve of his flies are wingless. This represents the great change which has come over fly dressing, and represents also the proportion of the average fly box. But the transformation is being carried still further at Stockbridge, where winged flies are being discarded, until I verily

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

believe that before long more trout will be captured on the hackled ones.

That is the first lesson which the visitor to Stockbridge learns. Whenever fish refuse a winged fly try a wingless one. Whether it be an iron blue or a caperer, a black gnat or a sedge, whether the day be hot and clear, or cold, wet and stormy, always use a hackle pattern.

The second lesson the visitor learns is the inadequacy of standard dressings, particularly of spent flies. Take the iron blue, for example: how hopelessly incorrect are the flies you buy in shops. Look at the spinner of the female, of which trout are as greedy as pigs. Compare your bought fly with one you pick off the water, or indeed with the plate in Mr. Mosely's book. Why, it bears no likeness to the living article, which has clear, rather broad wings, and an orange-red body. No wonder you could catch nothing that still May evening, when fish rose continuously and ceased not until dark. How can you expect that the critical, dainty trout, who have got exactly the taste they want, should eat something which looks so nasty? And that other night, the same sort of night, when kind fate had given you a houghton ruby—what was your experience then? Why, every trout took it. But can you wonder: just compare it with the fly on the water. The houghton ruby, and Lunn's particular, are two of the greatest successes of that most original of fly dressers. He has had many more triumphs, too: and do not fail to note that most of these are hackle flies.

The third lesson learnt at Stockbridge is the large

STOCKBRIDGE

number of patterns required for summer and autumn fishing. The four or five fly man must get out of his easy chair, he must wake up and bestir himself and use his eyes, and he will see that trout eat many different animals through a long autumn day. Here come and stand with me on this old plank bridge which crosses the broad rolling river, and let us see what there is to be seen. It is a clear September day. First of all, observe that the air is full of needle browns, with their weak flight and their four straw-coloured wings. Well, we need not bother about them, they will not get on to the water. Nor need we trouble about daddy-longlegs, for though some are kicking in the current I cannot believe that the aristocratic trout of Stockbridge will feed on so plebeian a fare. But look more closely: pale watery duns are drifting along and iron blues—iron blues of the small autumn race. And if you peer further you will see much more. Black smuts are coming down plentifully, a spent iron blue or two, with brick-red body and pearly wings, sail past, half crumpled up, small light sedges are flickering in the reeds, and an occasional red ant is protesting indignantly on the surface. Now, any of these insects a trout may take, and may take none other. The next trout may take something different, also to the exclusion of everything else. Your first fish ate a tiny smut, a starling hackle dressed on an almost bare hook. The second would not look at this, but swallowed a tup. The third was rising regularly, but would accept nothing: fly after fly was tried, five or six patterns, until finally he could not resist a red ant. So does the long day pass. Each trout

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

requires a different attack. It is not a question of finding the fly for the day, you must find it for each individual fish. Where are your four patterns now? By nightfall you have tried twenty.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NYMPH

You must fish in, or hard by, the stream, and have a quick hand and a ready eye and a nimble rod, strike with him or you lose him. This is the chiefe pleasure of Angling.

Note on the Trout. By WILLIAM LAWSON. 1620.

WHEN, EXACTLY TWENTY YEARS AGO, MR. SKUES wrote *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*, he effected a revolution. The dry fly was at the height of its intolerant dictatorship, and the other method was discarded and ridiculed to such an extent that enthusiasts of the school of Halford regarded Mr. Skues as a dangerous heresiarch. Much water has flowed under bridges since then, and in that water many are the trout which have been caught on a sunk fly which would not have fallen to a dry. More and more each year does nymph fishing become a part of the modern angler's equipment, and he who does not possess the art is gravely handicapped. And at the same time has come the realization that this art is both difficult and delightful. It demands different qualities and it makes a different appeal, it opens a new field of observation and experiment, and it is as exacting a process as the other, for upon my word I find trout harder to catch under water than on the top.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

Though I started experimenting when I read Mr. Skues, I am a beginner. True, I have one advantage, which ought to make me less incompetent than I am, for I was trained on a not too easy north country river where the practice was to fish upstream, and where in consequence, if you were to get anything of a bag, you had to strike your trout before you felt him and often without seeing him rise or take. Therein lies the art. And therein lies also a great distinction between the two classes of fish which you meet on a chalk stream: those which you can see in the water, and those which you cannot. The first are infinitely the easier. For example, if you cast in front of a trout and, as you judge that your fly is coming over him, he opens and shuts his mouth, or turns right or left, or makes any movement, you are pretty safe in striking and you will find that he has taken you more often than not. Keen eyesight is the secret of success, both for spotting fish and for seeing them take, and I do not think anyone can be really good without it.

That is all very well on some waters. It is possible at Driffield, or on the upper Itchen or Test, where trout are visible. But on the Kennet, or the middle or lower Test, where they are not, you have to fish for those which rise or bulge, which you cannot see. How are you to know when they take you? Assuredly you must not wait for a pull on the line, or you will hook none. There are three indications: you may see a boil, you may see the fish as he turns at the artificial, or you may see your floating gut move. The first two present no difficulty, for if you are moderately alert you will

THE NYMPH

hook a fair proportion of your rises. The trouble is the third, and that wants some explanation. Your fly, as it sinks, carries down with it some of your gut cast, but not all. Part of it will float, because the grease on your line has got on to your fingers and from them on to the cast, and very little grease is enough to make such light stuff as gut unsinkable. As everyone knows, it is wonderfully difficult to make your cast go down when you want it to do so: and this, a handicap with the dry fly, is the key to success with the nymph. The gut acts as a float, and when it is drawn under water you know that a fish has taken you. That sounds simple: you only have to watch your gut, and to strike when it draws or is pulled under. As a matter of fact, it is extremely difficult. In certain conditions of light, and in windy or ripply water, it is not easy to see your gut. But what I find the chief trouble is to distinguish between the natural pull on the gut, caused by the weight of your soaked and ever-sinking fly, and the movement caused by a trout having taken you. Sometimes it is obvious: your gut, instead of floating regularly down, stops, or straightens, or points upstream. As an eighteenth-century writer puts it, "you see the line go from you." This you can see, though often you see it too late. But generally there is no such decided indication. South-country trout take delicately. Moreover, if you think of it, you will realize that a fly, offering a bigger target to the current, will be carried in advance of the gut, and therefore, since there will be a curve of gut, often a large one, lying upstream, some time must elapse

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

between the take and any movement of the floating gut. This will usually be the case when you are casting straight up, and, to a lesser degree, depending on the run of the water, when you are throwing across, or across and up. How is this problem to be solved? A trout does not keep a fly long in his mouth, so how are you to strike him before he spits it out? Well, it is possible. It is possible to do, though impossible to describe. You can acquire the skill to know when a fish has touched your fly, and proof lies in the fact that the great wet fly fishers have this faculty. Let it be noted, too, that they have none of the advantages of floating line and gut. In spite of this handicap, they possess a gift, an intuition only given to the great masters, which is the hall mark of the finished angler. I consider this to be the highest pinnacle of our beautiful art. It is impossible to describe, as I well know, but I also well know that it is a very real thing. When a trout touches a fly, even when the line is slack, he gives some indication. This indication may be so minute as to be hardly perceptible, but it is granted to some to perceive it, almost by instinct or by a sixth sense. Watching a good north-country fisherman, he seems to know when to strike by magic. He has a skill which he cannot impart. It must be learnt, and it is learnt painfully. Nor is it confined to fishermen of the north. One of the very best of professional fishermen, who spends the whole season going with club members on a chalk stream, watching fish take under water, has acquired the faculty. But he told me that it took him two years to do so.

THE NYMPH

Do not overlook the truism that a sunk fly must sink, and must do so always and without hesitation. It must get where the trout are, and, when they are feeding deep, must go right down to them. Flies, which have an irritating habit of sinking when you want them to float, often refuse to sink when required to do so. If they have ever been oiled they decline absolutely to go under and no amount of soaking in the river or your mouth will persuade them. In that case you must use glycerine, and if you do as I do, and carry your spare casts and points in a glycerine damper, this is a simple matter. Then you should deliver your fly without any preliminary wavings, which must dry it, and with practice you can do this quite accurately. Again, gold wire round your fly is a help, and some dressers go as far as to put a little lead foil on to the hook. Or again you can have flies specially tied on what are called doubles. These are two hooks, separate and not brazed together, one of them eyed and the other not, which are laid flat one against another, and the fly dressed over them in the ordinary way: and then, before you fish, you press the two hooks apart with your thumb nail to an angle of 45 degrees. The double was one of the many tips I gained from *Minor Tactics*. Undoubtedly, flies so dressed sink more quickly and more deeply. Also they hook decidedly better, in the smaller sizes. I used them a great deal twenty years ago, but I have given them up for the following reason.

A fly ought to go into a trout's mouth without resistance. He does not snap at his food like a dog. He draws in a thread of water, the insect with it,

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

expelling the water through his gills, and since in this process he hardly opens his mouth, an artificial which goes in without checking is less likely to cause suspicion. In fact, flies can be divided into those which are compressible and those which are not. Most mayflies, winged with stiff-ribbed whole feathers, are in the second class, and this is one reason why trout are so hard to hook with the mayfly. Now it is obvious that a double hook may cause obstruction, and I discarded them accordingly. I may go back to them. They have great merits.

One of the softest, most compressible, patterns is the partridge hackle, and, whether this be the reason or not, I consider it the best sunk fly on the Test. Its body, of silk, can be of many colours. I find the old Cumberland pattern, the orange partridge, best; and next to that the red. Oddly enough, I am most successful with a hook either very large, No. 2 or even 3, or else 000, and this is the case independently of weather or water. One very hot windless day in September 1929, in slow water and a burning glare, I found a fish smutting. I had on a No. 3 orange partridge on which I had been killing grayling in the fast shallow above. Almost for a joke, I dropped this monstrous morsel a foot above him. He had it at once and I landed him. I do not feel at all sure he would have taken a 000.

However, if a fish looks at a large pattern and refuses, try him with something smaller. I have found that if he declines one of the brown bodied nymphs he will take a red partridge three or four sizes smaller. And if he only noses at one of the

THE NYMPH

yellow bodied articles, give him that famous north country fly, a dotterel and yellow, dressed small.

On patterns I can add little to what Mr. Skues has said. I have found the partridge hackle the best underwater fly. But many of the lures used floating frequently kill better sunk. The blue upright and the pheasant tail often do this, and to a lesser degree the tup, the hackle hare's ear and the hackle caperer. And so occasionally do the spinners. The old-fashioned rough olive is well taken on the Kennet, and greenwell's glory also. I have never tried on the Test either the blue dun of my boyhood, with a body of mole's fur and a wing of light snipe, or the yellow dun, with a pale starling wing, light ginger hackle and an admirable body of yellow thread, waxed to a golden olive, but I hope to do so. That excellent new fly, the hackle blue wing, is described in another chapter.

I am still in the experimental stage. I have not decided whether the modern nymph type beats the old-fashioned copy, though I am inclined to believe that an ordinary hackle dressing is just as good as the more up-to-date article. Of nymphs proper, I find a yellow body, or one of brown seal's fur, kills best. But here again Mr. Skues can tell you more than I can.

Such is underwater fishing, in my imperfect experience. I sometimes catch fish by this method, and if I fail, as I do very often, I put it down to my own incompetence, clumsiness and ineptitude. These are qualities which are always with me.

CHAPTER XX
AFTER MANY YEARS

This is the Tenor of my belief, wherein, though there be many things singular, and to the humour of my irregular selfe, yet, if they square not with maturer Judgements, I disclaime them, and doe no further father them, then the learned and best Judgements shall authorize them.

Religio Medici. By SIR THOMAS BROWNE. 1642.

ANYONE WHO HAS FISHED FOR A GENERATION OR more ought to have something to say however inefficient he may be. He will have had much experience: and this is necessary if you are to describe so varied a pursuit as angling, where the possibilities are so many that some incidents only repeat themselves once or twice in a lifetime. The factors which go to make up success or failure are so numerous that until you have been through the same incident often you usually misjudge it. You do not assign the right cause. You are continually making wonderful discoveries which you think will revolutionize the pursuit and prevent you from ever coming home empty. At one time, after deep study of Halford, I was quite sure that every fish taking newly hatched mayfly would rise to a caperer, always and everywhere: for a time the charm acted, and it was long before I would admit to myself that

AFTER MANY YEARS

trout were often as hard to catch on a caperer as on anything else. Long ago, before spent spinners were invented, I found what I now should know to be a mad spinner rise, and, after trying red quills and detached badgers and other historic patterns in vain, discovered that a large sedge trailed over their noses resulted in the capture of two or three trout in well-fished water. That indelicate proceeding succeeded twice, at short intervals: and my feelings were like those Lord Grey of Fallodon describes when he found that Itchen trout would take a sunk hackle—how to use my discovery with sufficient moderation. But my self-restraint was put to no test, I never had the same success again, and though it is many years since I used that method I cannot think that it would be more profitable now. Many smaller inventions have I thought I have discovered which wider experience has upset. We all pass through the same stages and treat an experience as universal, whereas in reality it is conditioned by factors which we overlook. We are not all so fortunate as Mr. Skues, whose discovery that fish eating blue-winged olives will take an orange quill is generally accepted. Here the artificial does not copy the natural fly, but is, I suppose, complementary. But there are other instances of complementary flies, once held to be infallible, but now discarded or forgotten. Once a wickham or a silver sedge were the recognized lures for smutting fish. No one uses them now. It was once thought that that improbable dressing, the blue quill, had a fascination for trout taking pale watery duns: the only times I tried it I scared more fish than I

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

secured. We shall always go on deducing general rules from particular instances, and it is right that we should, for by that road does knowledge advance: but we must continually bring our theories back to the test of practice, and then they generally collapse.

This being so, it is perhaps not surprising that I claim no wonderful discoveries. In fact I have made none. What I have learnt, very painfully, has been invented by others. So I propound no theory and preach no creed: all I can do is to describe what has happened to me and to find out why it is that I so often make a mess of things. If anything that I say seems opinionated, will the reader understand that I am dogmatic only to be brief?

Nearly all fishermen cast too often. We always say that trout are cunning, but we always treat them like fools. A feeding fish sees everything which goes over his head, and if he does not take, it is not because he does not see. Yet we continually act as if it were: we keep hammering away, behaving as though we were shouting at someone who is deaf. He is not blind at all, he is remarkably perceptive: and I sometimes think he knows as much about our mentality as we know about his.

Often a fisherman finds himself, at the beginning of the hatch, at the bottom of a nice stretch, which he has to himself. Olives are sailing down, and fish are taking them steadily. He soon picks out a good one and settles down to it, but though he makes no mistake and the fish goes on eating, his

AFTER MANY YEARS

fly it will not eat. Should he leave it and try another? A difficult question, on which practice differs. Speaking generally, you do immensely better by sticking to your fish. If you do not, you get into a hurried, scrappy method of just showing the fish the fly you think he ought to like, and of rushing on to the next if he does not. You should treat each trout as an individual problem, and make up your mind that you will not leave him till you have solved it. This should be your general rule: but there are exceptions to it, as to all rules of angling. Let me take a case. You try your first fish with a blue upright, at which he never even looks. A ginger quill meets with the same treatment, and so does a Lunn's particular. You are puzzled: he is swallowing every olive which comes over him, you are sure of this, you can see him do it. Your patterns are well dressed, you are casting no worse than usual, and your gut is 4x: what are you to do? It is a perfect day, sun and cloud, with a light up-stream breeze: trout are rising quietly all the way up the river, and you have every prospect of a heavy bag. How much longer are you to stick to this obstinate fellow? Now, the one essential thing on a day such as this is to find the right imitation, for if you do that, you may have one of those really big bags. Finding the right imitation sounds easy, for all you have to do is to copy the fly on the water: but it is not easy, it is difficult. It is difficult because a trout's fancy differs on different days: on one day he likes a blue upright, on another a variant, on another a whit-church dun. You expect the first fish to tell you

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

this, but he tells you nothing. Well, under these circumstances, after trying three or four patterns, I should leave him. He may be a super-fish, or a food crank. Try another, but do not go on to a third or a fourth. You will do little good. I do not say that if you go from fish to fish, presenting each with the best copy, you will not find one who will take you. You will, and perhaps more than one: but you will have put down many, spoiled much water, exasperated yourself, and in the end, perhaps, caught less than if you had kept quietly to fewer fish. If, however, you have found the right fly, if two or three fish have taken it, do not waste time over one who refuses. He may be an eccentric: so crawl away from the bank, make a circuit through the meadow, and approach the next. You must never expect every fish to take you, for on difficult water that happens so rarely as not to be worth thinking about. It is enough if a fair proportion can be persuaded. If it is at all a long rise, you will come across a trout here and there who disregards the fly which the others took readily: if you spend time over him, trying fly after fly, you may get him: but if you have discovered the pattern which most of them want, leave him alone and go on to others.

For if you want to make a bag, you must not waste time over difficult fish. Other things being equal, the angler who covers most trout catches most. To some people, capturing the problem fish is the most fascinating part of our art; others like to come home with that delightful possession, a heavy load. Good fishermen are found in both

AFTER MANY YEARS

classes, and you will please yourself which plan you follow.

Always be on the watch for trout changing from one fly to another: this happens frequently when olives and iron blues come together. And there is another habit which has to be noted. It is a morning, we will say, in June, no fly is on the water, and the rise has not started. You have tied on some pattern with which to tempt the casual movers, say a ginger quill or hackle olive. It is taken by a couple of fish running, and you breathe a sigh of relief on thinking that you have chosen the right fly: but then three fish refuse it and you have to begin all over again. The reason is that, between your catching the first two fish and trying for the next three, the hatch has started and trout have moved definitely on to the new insect. And whenever iron blues are about, use this pattern, although trout are taking something else. I have often been caught out by neglecting to do so. On 20th July 1924, at Mottisfont, olives began to appear at two o'clock, and at half-past two I saw a rise. I had on a ginger quill, and did not change it: it was taken almost at the first throw and I landed a trout of 2 lb. 2 oz. As soon as he was put in the bag I found two more good fish moving. The first was an easy across-and-up shot, and I made certain he would take my ginger quill. He never looked at it. I tried to make sure what he was feeding on, but it was a wild, windy day and it was hard to see. At last he ate an undeniable olive. I tried an olive quill and two other patterns, without a look: so I crawled away and went to the other fish. I watched

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

him also, and he swallowed an olive. But he refused to swallow my artificial. At last I put on an iron blue, hooked him at once, but lost him after a stiff battle. Then back to the first and rose him too. And then all was over until sunset. Had I tried an iron blue sooner I might have had another brace, for there were several fish rising.

Everyone knows that the fly should be cocked, but there are divergent opinions as to the distance ahead of the fish it should alight. The more I fish, the closer I cast. For a trout straight above you in slow water, four to six inches is enough; in a fast, tearing stream, three feet, and so for intermediate distances. If you are casting across, or across and up, you can put the fly as far ahead as you like, so long as it reaches him without drag: but you will usually find two to four feet about right. Remember that three feet is only wanted for a tumbling, racing stream, where a fish has difficulty in keeping his position, and who, before he leaves it, requires a little time to think how he will get back. He must be given a good sight of the fly. But for ordinary quick water, running at the usual pace of a shallow of the Test, a foot ahead is enough. As I have said before, it matters not a row of little apples how often you are short of him, but it matters very much if you put line over him. Make up your mind that, whatever happens, that shall never happen.

Note particularly the intervals at which a trout rises: you will find that these remain constant, and that there is a rhythm or cadence in his movements. Either he takes fly after fly at so many seconds'

AFTER MANY YEARS

or minutes' interval, or he takes three or four quickly, and then goes down to meditate. See that your artificial comes over him at the time he would take a natural, were it there. It is no use casting to a fish during a period of retirement: get ready, and throw as rapidly as you can as soon as he starts moving again. You will find that attention to this point saves you the labour of fruitless casting and procures you more fish. You will find it particularly useful with the mayfly.

Cruisers are either quite easy or quite difficult: they are easy if you can see them, hard if you cannot. Whenever the conditions of light and reflection make it possible for you to see a cruiser at any period of his career, never cast when he is invisible: do not fish during his temporary disappearances, even though you are sure you know where he is. And of course you will always throw in the line he is travelling. If you cannot see him, chance enters the field, and you can only be cautious and hopeful. The most extravagant cruisers I ever met were on a river in County Louth, Ireland. In mayfly time the big fish—and they had been killed up to six pounds—would traverse regularly a beat which might be a hundred yards long. Invisible, a heavy trout would sail up and down this in sedate and leisurely fashion, devouring the mayflies he met on his road. Now such a world-traveller was in a different category from the stroller of the Test, whom you can reach without changing your place, merely by lengthening or shortening line: the Irish fish soon passed out of range: if you ran after him, you either found that you were usefully

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

showing your fly to his tail, or else you put him down. The better plan, the one I was advised to adopt, was to choose some place about the middle of his beat, where there were no obstructions, and the regular flow of the stream allowed your fly to float long without drag. Once there, you noted the path through the stretch which he took on his journeys up or down, a path which varied little, and you selected a spot where you could cast straight across to him. Then you knelt down. When you saw his rises getting nearer and nearer, you waited until he was ten to fifteen yards off, then you cast, kept your fly floating to the last second, and then immediately cast again, so that your fly was on the water without an interval. There are many exciting incidents in angling: a big fish splashing at sedge in the still dusk: a salmon of thirty pounds boiling at your fly: the last stage of the fight with a three-pounder on 4x gut: but I have rarely been more shaken than by one of these cruisers, whom I verily believe to have been five pounds. I had chosen my station cautiously and prudently: I studied his path to an inch: I knew him to be sixty yards below me: and then suddenly there he was, taking a mayfly, forty yards off. I waited what seemed an endless time. Had he passed me? Three mayflies were drifting down in a string, and I watched them idly. They were fifteen yards below—and he took all three, one above the other. Quickly I cast: my fly floated two yards, I whipped it off before it dragged, and instantly put it on the water again, beautifully cocked. It had hardly sailed two inches when he

AFTER MANY YEARS

had it: he had it with a gulp, but with my usual fatuity I missed him. I hit him hard, there was a boil like a submarine mine, and that five-pounder was seen no more.

Halford, when he wrote in 1889, praised the underhand cast—the cast in which the line is both returned and thrown in the horizontal plane, parallel to the water. He considered that its advantages were that it made you independent of wind, enabled you to fish under bridges or boughs, cocked the fly oftener than any other method, and did not frighten fish: and he advised that it should be used generally, and not only in wind or on encumbered water. He has not been followed: I see fewer underhand casters to-day than I did thirty years ago: I myself was one, and can still put out a longish line. But I find now that I use it only for special emergencies. All anglers should master it, however: master it so thoroughly that, standing below a road bridge with narrow arches, you can hook the fish rising above it. And under trees, too, you must possess this accomplishment. It is useful also when the wind is blowing across and into you, and you are casting with that hand which is over the river to a fish rising under your bank, or against a light head wind: also you must use it when you are very close to your quarry and dare not wag your rod in the air. But on other occasions there are better methods.

I gave it up for three reasons. Your fly is always catching behind, and either breaking off or picking up strands of grass or hay: you cannot overcome drag so well as by the overhead plan: and placing

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

the fly is difficult. The older I get the more certain am I that accurate placing is nine-tenths of the game. And the underhand cast is not the best method when throwing directly against a wind, and is useless against a strong wind: nor does it cock the fly any better than another plan.

The overhead cast can be learnt by anyone in a week, but he may spend the rest of his life in learning to defeat wind. Suppose that you are fishing a straight piece of water, with a strong wind dead down stream, you will have to make three different sorts of cast. You may have to throw to a fish level with you under the opposite bank, casting across wind: or to a fish rising above you in midstream, casting across and up wind: or to fish under your own bank, casting straight up wind. The cross wind cast is all a question of timing, it is easy to learn, and your fly cocks beautifully. It is a firm, steady swing rather than a cast. Placing the fly is not difficult, though if the wind be very strong you may have to aim some yards above where you mean the line to fall. It is an untold advantage to be ambidextrous, for if you can always use the down wind hand you can get out a long line with greater ease. The across-and-up cast is not much more difficult either. Hold the rod, not upright, but slanting over the water. Get the idea that you are cutting under the wind.

So the cross wind or the cross-and-up wind cast can be mastered with a little intelligence and practice. Far different is the throw straight against a wind, for if it be strong there is no angling feat more difficult. You only learn it after misery and

AFTER MANY YEARS

cursing and incompetence and imbecility, and a conviction of your hopeless ineptitude. To cast time after time to a trout under your own bank, and to see your reel line always going out straight, but your fly and gut always blown back and not going anywhere near the fish, reduces you to a condition of helpless rage. I have suffered so bitterly that I want to do what little I can to save other victims. There are six points.

First, use the overhead cast, with the rod straight. Second, do not throw quickly. You must use force, but it must be a controlled force. Remember that your line goes out slowly against a strong wind, and, if you slash, it has no time to extend. Get the feeling of a strong, controlled push, using firm and quiet force, and dwelling on the line with the point of the rod until the last moment. Third, get the feeling that you are not so much casting as laying the line, fully extended, on the surface of the water. Fourth, if your fly still gets blown back, try finishing the cast with half of your top joint in the water. Fifth, reduce your gut to seven feet. And sixth, if you are ambidextrous, and the banks permit of it, use what Mr. Skues calls the overland route, and fish with the inshore hand. In this case you may find the underhand cast the best. That is the result of my experience: but you will find, if you are at all like me, that you must keep in constant practice, and that you vary on different days, as you do in shooting. Such small skill as I possess was painfully acquired on a stretch of river, uncompromisingly straight, running due east, unsheltered, and where you felt the unbroken

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

force of the various westerly gales which go to make up an English summer.

That is the first feat in casting. The second is to throw a slack line, and yet never show the fish more than the fly and a few inches of gut. Now, it is obvious that if you are trying for a fish straight above you, and casting in curves, if you do happen to throw straight, your reel line will fall beautifully over his head: while if you check the rod too much your fly will not reach him. Only long practice will teach you the exact length of line you want, and the force to use in checking. An up-stream wind always makes the cast difficult, and if strong, impossible. A light head-wind is best.

The third feat is cocking your fly, essential when you are putting a winged artificial over shy fish. You do this best by casting overhead or with slanting rod and distinctly checking your line when extended over the water, so that the fly is not dashed on to the surface, but poised in the air, almost motionless for the fraction of a second, and then allowed to drop by its own weight. When I started the dry fly I thought I could cock best by the underhand cast, but now I am quite sure I succeed oftener by an overhead throw, checked. You do not cock every time, but you do so more often than not. A light head-wind is a help.

But now I come to the greatest feat of modern casting, throwing the curve. I do not know who invented it. Lord Grey went some way towards it in 1899: Mr. Horace Hutchinson described something like it a short time later: Mr. E. R. Hewitt figured it in *Secrets of the Salmon* in 1922: and Mr.

AFTER MANY YEARS

George La Branche gave the final statement of it in *The Salmon and the Dry Fly* in 1924. I must refer readers to this book, which describes it better than I could. They will find the system fully and admirably worked out. All that I will add is that it is essential to fish with a slanting rod, and I find it easier the more the rod approaches the horizontal. Difficult it always is, but it is becoming the foundation of summer fishing for shy trout. I am a very imperfect performer, but even so it is less difficult to me than drifting the fly, that is, down-stream fishing. That is quite extraordinarily hard. The trouble is that if weed, or even a leaf, touches your line, it checks it and causes a drag. It is simplest in open water: but in summer, when you have to use the method, very little water is open, for weeds are everywhere.

On some rivers, and at some times on all, especially in a long and dry summer, trout will stand no gut whatever over their heads. The worst offenders are those of Driffield, next those of the Test and Itchen, with the Kennet last. Sometimes at Driffield fish really swim round your fly to see if there is gut on any side of it. And I have know days on which a cast straight over a fish's head was fatal, and have had to put the fly from six inches to a foot alongside him, according to the pace of the water. The trout of the Test are very nearly as bad. You will find occasions when they behave outrageously. It makes you furious to see them careering off like maniacs, too stupid to appreciate the remarkable skill with which you are fishing. The curve alone meets the difficulty.

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

I am a polytheist about patterns. Those in my box number thirty-eight, not reckoning mayflies or nymphs, or various tints of olives separately. Probably twenty years ago I carried a different series. However, I have just worked out the percentage value of each pattern on the Test for the last five seasons. Here is the result: mayflies and sedges are left out.

Ginger quill	12
Orange quill	11
Blue upright	10
Lunn's particular	10
Iron blue, winged and hackled	9
Sherry spinner	8
Hackled hare's ear	6
Variant	5
Caperer, winged and hackled	5
Hackle blue wing	4
Houghton ruby	4
Black gnat and smut, winged and hackled	3
Yellow boy	3
Partridge hackle	3
Nymph	2
Ant	2
Tup	2
Various	1
	<hr/>
	100
	<hr/>

This is a curious list, and works out unexpectedly.

It is truly amazing that the red quill does not appear in it, for twenty years ago it would certainly have headed the list. Out of every 100 fish, 92 were killed on the surface and 8 below, 3 of these being got on partridge hackles, 2 on nymphs, and

AFTER MANY YEARS

3 more on some of the floating patterns, used sunk. Of the 92 which were taken on the top, no fewer than 25 fell to spent spinners, chiefly Lunn's particular and sherry, and of the remainder, 38 took winged flies and 29 hackled ones. Excluding "various," 18 patterns were used.

It would be presumption for the worst striker in the world to give advice, except what to avoid. Nearly everyone strikes too quickly, for you cannot be too leisurely with big fish. But in this respect trout in different rivers differ greatly, and you have to learn them all. The slowest takers are big Test trout, the quickest those of the Kennet. However, all chalk-stream fish are much more deliberate than those of the north or west. Going recently straight from the Test to the Devonshire Otter, a nice dry fly stream, I was struck with the speed with which they took and let go. They lie lower in the water, come up with a dash, and the line must be tightened instantaneously, or you fail to hook them. And, travelling farther afield, the quickness of the light mobile creatures of the north or west is wonderful. Fishing once a deep, clear lake in Carnarvonshire, I missed fish after fish, though they were plainly to be seen coming at the fly. At length I found that they must be struck before they reached it: this answered so well that, instead of being missed, every one was hooked, and I staggered back under one of those baskets which it is a joy to carry. And, by the way, this method of striking before the trout reaches the fly was recommended by Leonard Mascall over three centuries ago. With the sunk fly as with the dry, the successful strike is the hall

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

mark of the finished angler: all his tackle, all his skill is as naught, if he be one of those luckless ones described by an old French writer: "*qui ne les sçaura pas piquer dans le tems qu'il faut.*"

Which is the most difficult river in the world? We should all agree that it is one of the chalk streams, but we should quarrel over which to choose, for each would vaunt the supremacy of his favourite water. The selection would probably lie between the four I have named, Test, Itchen, Kennet and Driffield. The only way to decide is to compare the different qualities which constitute difficulty in angling. You find the freest risers on Test or Itchen, bracketed first, with Driffield a good third, and the Kennet a bad last. As to ease of approach, you have to keep much farthest off a Kennet fish, and you can get nearest a Driffield fish. Kennet trout, too, are more difficult to bring up to the fly, but when brought up are easier to hook. You get most false rises on the Test, with Itchen close behind, and Driffield and Kennet at the other end. In fastidiousness about pattern the Test is top. In gut shyness Driffield is an easy first, with Itchen and Test next and Kennet fourth. Lastly, Kennet trout are hardest to kill, for they are the strongest and make the most intelligent use of weed. But you are more likely to hook a big Test fish lightly and to lose him, owing to his crafty way of taking you. Driffield fish are easiest killed.

That is the sum: and at the end I find myself unable to decide. I find it impossible to grade rivers in a scale of the skill required. The impression you gain after much fishing is their difference.

AFTER MANY YEARS

Coming to new water, you have to learn it afresh: each river has a strong individuality. I have known anglers, successful on one water they knew well, fail utterly on another, and what seemed to me less exacting, stream. To be fully qualified, a fisherman must have fished widely as well as intensively: and the wider his experience the less is he inclined to generalize.

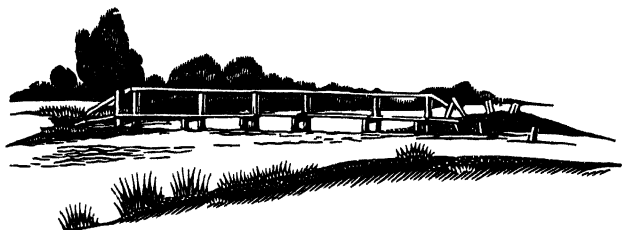
It is forty years ago next June that I first fished at Whitchurch. I did not make acquaintance with the middle or lower Test till later. Whitchurch fishing, and indeed all that of the upper Test, has changed, and changed for the worse. In those days fish were there in swarms, and bags of six brace were common: in fact, so plentiful were they that one of your great problems was to approach a trout without frightening others who would put him away. And you did not see so many lean and black objects as you see to-day. Longparish, too, is certainly less prolific than it used to be, and so is the Hurstbourne water. But undoubtedly the middle stretches have suffered less, if at all, and when you come to Stockbridge, fishing is probably better. And, in waters lower still, at Mottisfont and Kimbridge, the fishing has on the whole improved. There is no need to fear the future.

Finally, may I end with a word of advice? If, like so many of us, you have to do your 'fishing away from home, do not forget that you are a stranger and that you are coming among those who have lived there all their lives, and their fathers before them, and who regard you as an invader of something which they look upon as their own. Be

A SUMMER ON THE TEST

courteous, offend no prejudices, and, when you have the opportunity, perform little acts of kindness. Above all, you will not do wrong if, instead of sending your fish away to those who will hardly value the gift, you give them to such of your neighbours as are in humbler circumstances and who get few chances of tasting that admirable food, a fat trout. You will find that they welcome the gift all the more because it comes from a river to which their lives and affections are bound by ties closer than those of ownership.

THE END



A BRIDGE OVER THE TEST

AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

Accn. No.....

1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days,